









BEK'S FIRST CORNER.

# BY MRS. NATHANIEL CONKLIN.

(JENNIE M. DRINKWATER.)

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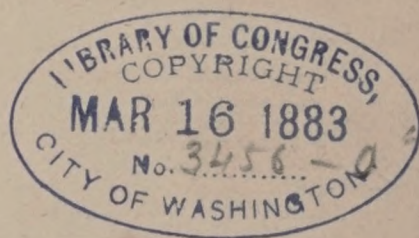
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BY

MRS. NATHANIEL CONKLIN  
(JENNIE M. DRINKWATER)

"Short sentences drawn from a long experience"



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# BEK'S FIRST CORNER.

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## I.

### THAT LAST NIGHT.

"Life is a short day; but it is a working day."

HANNAH MORE.

It might have been a trial to every one of the other girls, this old-fashioned name of hers, but it was not to Bek—for two excellent reasons: first, because it had a precious history; and second, because she did not know how to make trials for herself. She had never had a real trouble and her faith was too sunshiny to admit of trials.

Rebekah! The pronunciation was not so "horrid," but in the writing there stood the awkward "k" and that heavy "h." It did matter, of course—everything matters at twenty; but there was "Bek" left to her, and that had a foreign sound, was a wee bit dainty, and so odd! And her mother had written it so from the first.

"Bek!"

Bek made no answer, she was too busy writing her name and address upon a square white card to lift her eyes or to answer. Nowadays Bek was rather absent-minded. She said that it was because she had so many things to think about.

REBEKAH HOWE WESTERLY.

It looked pretty enough written; it looked pretty written in Bek's characteristic hand. None of the girls wrote in her fashion; several of them had attempted imitation without perfect success.

REBEKAH!

Holding the card a little way off she studied it critically. Yes, it was "simply and dreadfully" Rebekah.

The quotation is from herself. She is somebody worth quoting from.

The girls had followed her mother's fashion—Gertrude Raymond had brought it from Clovernook and had shortened it into "Bek." The girls were Rebekah's world—her laughing, chatting, dreaming world. Some of the girls preferred *Rebe*, but she liked *Bek* better, it was like herself—uncommon. The "uncommon" is not in quotations.

"Bek! Speak to me," commanded Mollie Sherwood impatiently. "I've been watching you three

long minutes and you haven't even raised those glorious orbs."

The glorious orbs raised themselves for one instant; she was dreaming over such an every-day thing as a card to be tacked upon her trunk.

"I think I heard a sound, but it was in the dim distance. I was thinking about home, and wondering if now since baby's advent I could find time for all the things I have planned to do."

"*All those things!*" repeated Mollie deliberately. "If Methusaleh's wife had outlived her husband, she couldn't have done all the things you have planned to do."

"System accomplishes all things," said Bek oracularly. "Have you been all these years at Rutledge Felix and not learned that?"

"System," began Mollie comfortably, "will not create two hours a day for you to practice, two hours to keep on with French and German, two hours to begin Hebrew in with Mr. Dunraven, three hours for general reading, six for household affairs under the conduct of your invaluable Pauline, one hour for needlework, five to attend to the children, three to be your mother's special companion, four to give to all Clovernook—"

"Mollie! Mollie!" laughed Bek, "do give me one little minute to rest in."

"'Rest is the fitting of self to one's sphere,'" quoted Mollie; "at that rate you have nothing but rest to look forward to."

"I wish I hadn't quite so many plans," acknowledged Bek thoughtfully, rolling up one edge of the card. "One person can't do everything; if one could, there would be no need of everybody else."

"That's logic and common sense," returned Mollie. "I'd like to know one thing you haven't planned to do. I know you were dinging your plans in my ears last night when I fell asleep."

"I can't give up teaching the children," Bek decided, resting her head against the side of her trunk.

She was a little thing in a gray travelling dress curled up on the carpet at the foot of the bed in her cosy hall bedroom at Rutledge Felix. Mollie Sherwood was one of the day pupils, but Mrs. Graves, the preceptress, had given her permission to spend this last night with her "comrade," Bek Westerly.

The other girls had bosom friends: these two

were comrades. That meant fun and fighting together. How much fun they had had together these last three years at Rutledge Felix, and how many things in themselves, in each other, and against people and circumstances generally they had had to fight against!

Mrs. Graves in her talks to the girls said "contend," but, freely translated, it meant "fight" to Bek. And yet Bek did not look like a fighter. The music teacher called her "the little lady of Rutledge Felix."

Perched on the foot of the bed Mollie leaned over the low foot-board and looked down at her.

"Lulu expects regular teaching in music; she has been teaching herself and is quite a genius; Nell and Floy are bright little students and are ready to give up the Clovernook school and study with me, Chip is counting on my help in several things, and now there's the baby! Mother has lovely color and she hops about like a little bird from one thing to another, but father thinks she isn't strong and is so anxious for me to come home! Mother laughs at him, but I know she is counting on me, too. And you know my plan of coming back here to take charge of the junior class." Bek's cheeks were in a glow.

"Why don't you do both?" asked Mollie gravely.

"I wish I could," said Bek, as gravely.

Mollie bent over and pulled the rings of hair on Bek's forehead, the light, fluffy, babyish rings of hair.

Rebekah of old was "fair" to look upon, but our Rebekah was rather dark despite her gray eyes and pale golden hair. How it chanced that the dark, clear complexion accompanied the eyes and hair that were her father's legacy, nobody knew, unless dark, old Aunt Rebekah threw it down to her "that morning she was born."

To be frank, that complexion was something of a trial to Bek.

"Do you remember—last night?" asked Bek after a pause.

The question came with some effort.

"Well! What of it?" questioned Mollie impatiently. "Mr. Rutledge doesn't live in this world; and the idea of asking us to promise to live on earth as we ought to live in Heaven. And you *did* promise, rash child, you were the only one of us nineteen graduates that would promise. Aren't you sorry now?"

"No," said Bek, decidedly, "I am more and

more glad every hour. But you did not put it as he did. He asked us to pray 'Thy will be done on earth as it is done in Heaven' and to promise that we would try to do it on earth as it is done in Heaven."

"I don't see how you dared," said Mollie.

"I don't see how I didn't dare," retorted Bek. "Whose will is to be done has got to be settled some time and I settled it for myself once and forever last night."

"It frightens me," acknowledged Mollie, "we don't know what dreadful things He may choose for us."

The serious look deepened in Mollie's mischievous eyes. In Bek's eyes the serious look sweetened; she was not afraid.

"It was a reasonable promise," Bek said, "I like to do reasonable things. I wish you would promise, too, Mollie."

"I can't," said Mollie, with a wilful quiver of the lip, "I can't give up my will in everything and do—that other will as he said the saints and angels do: unhesitatingly, cheerfully, unquestioningly. I *have* to question. I want the things I want. Why, Bek, don't you want your own way, at all."

"Certainly I do. I want everything I want until God says no. That's the thing—to be willing for Him to say no or yes. And never will yes to His no or will no to His yes. And to do it without a question, without a murmur, without a pause."

"You don't mean to say you *can* do that?" questioned Mollie in sheer surprise.

"No, indeed," said Bek, with a little laugh, "that is what I am starting out to do. I'm not a saint in Heaven yet, only the poorest kind of a saint on earth. But one spark is real fire, you know."

"I know *you* are real fire," said Mollie assured that the stand her comrade had taken was not the result of fanaticism or a too readily kindled enthusiasm; Mr. Rutledge or Miss Southernwood had not urged her; it was all of her own free will.

"How can you be willing not to choose for yourself?" reasoned Mollie, still with rebellion in her tone. "Don't you want to choose whether to stay here and teach or whether to go home, and don't you want to choose your life at home? Don't you want to choose all your future? Don't you want to choose whether you shall be married

or not, and you surely want to choose your husband," Mollie protested, indignation gathering in her eyes.

Bek did not smile; Mollie was in solemn earnest.

She would not acknowledge it to Mollie for anything, but last night, before she had promised, she had considered this—her possible future.

Flushing as she spoke she said:

"I am willing about that, too."

"Somebody might be chosen for you that you couldn't *endure*; somebody not educated, or congenial, or distinguished in any way, without money or position—and then what *would you* do?"

Bek laughed.

"I'm afraid I haven't considered the money or position."

"You haven't considered anything, you see!" Mollie hurried on, heatedly. "Suppose he should be intemperate or—somebody who had to work with his own hands to support you."

Bek laughed again.

"I think He knows what He is getting me ready for; or perhaps I am getting ready to be the loveliest old maid in existence, another Miss Southernwood, for instance."

"Horrid!" ejaculated Mollie.

"I am sure He will choose one of His own disciples."

"You are not sure anything about it. You can't be satisfied unless you choose for yourself."

"His way of choosing may be signified by letting me choose," said Bek.

"That's sophistry," said Mollie, crossly.

"You don't know what 'sophistry' is," answered Bek.

"I know about this. A friend in India wrote me about it. Wasn't she indignant? So was I. You will be doing some such thing some day. A young lady somewhere in Europe let her photograph be sent to a missionary in India who wanted a wife and after some correspondence, I suppose; he asked her to come out and marry him. And she went. And when he saw her, he was not satisfied, and refused to marry her. And what did she do then but marry another missionary who *was* satisfied with her! What do you think of that?" asked Molly in a triumphant tone.

"She was not an American girl nor an English girl," said Bek.

"No."

"You know just what I think! I can't explain

just what I mean; but if you will wait long enough, I'll show you."

"I'll wait," promised Mollie, mockingly.

"My life may be a busy life with no time or thought for—such things," said Bek, indefinitely.

"That will be just as bad," exclaimed Mollie, "that is no destiny at all."

"I don't have to think about it now—I don't have *ever* to think about it. I don't need ever to plan for myself at all. All I have to do is to listen and obey. See how much more time I have than you—always at leisure from myself. I have time for other people. You have to make plans and work hard to carry them out, and how can you be sure they will succeed. Nothing would frighten me so much as being left to have my own way. It would be like rushing on in the dark and never knowing what you would rush into or rush against."

"I think you are horrid to talk to me like that," pouted Mollie. "I only came to stay with you that we might have our last talk and now you have spoiled it all. I wanted to plan ever so many things for us to do."

Bek arose slowly, found a small hammer and six tacks on the little table close to the wall and

fastened the card upon one end of her trunk with an absent-minded look in her eyes.

When Bek was grave, she was very grave. *Was* she spoiling the "last talk"? In comforting herself was she taking Mollie's comfort away?

"So did I, and so I do," Bek exclaimed springing towards her and catching her in her arms.

"I don't suppose I shall see you for ever so long," said Mollie, breaking a silence of two minutes.

"Why, do you sail so soon?"

"As soon as ever we can. My things are about ready. If you would only not go home to-morrow, but come and stay with us until we sail! Oh, why can't you? That's the loveliest plan of all."

"There's mother and the new baby," hesitated Bek, "if it were not for that—"

"The baby will keep," suggested Mollie.

"And mother will keep—wishing for me," replied Bek.

"House work and teaching children and taking care of a crying baby!"

Mollie's lip curled in school-girl fashion, happily Bek's eyes were on the diamond ring that she was twisting around on Mollie's "engage-

ment" finger; Mollie might not have enjoyed Bek's retort. Bek would not fight for herself, but she was ready to fight for that "crying baby."

"And my life is a trip to Europe and a tour through Europe and coming home to be married! Oh, how different your life is from mine, you poor little Rebekah! You poor, dear, darling, doleful, little Bek!"

There *was* a difference, a difference not pleasant to contemplate. And how Bek loved good times. How she would have enjoyed the travel in Europe and the blessed coming home afterward. Mollie was the only child and she herself was one of six and her father was her step-father.

Mollie's gayety returned as Bek listened and laughed and planned good times after the home coming; a letter was to be written every week by each of them, "rain or shine," and each was to make the other an annual visit.

"I want you to admire Ernest and hear him talk," said Mollie persuasively.

"I do—and have," said Bek, seriously.

"*Can't* you come, possibly?" coaxed Mollie.

The disappointed look in Bek's eyes was not encouraging.

"Father and mother would be so pleased, too."

"But mother— I can't think of her disappointment. She was almost counting the hours in the letter I had last night."

"But she is so unselfish! If she only knew how much you want to stay! Can't you telegraph? Your father or Chip will be in Cumberland tomorrow—send it to the care of some one there whom they will be sure to see! Now it's all planned!" cried Mollie, clapping her hands. "And you will stay and see us off, go down to the steamer and everything!"

For one instant Bek wavered, then she saw the shade of surprise and disappointment in her mother's eyes and decided quickly.

"I want to ever so much, but I couldn't be happy thinking of mother."

"I know she wouldn't care," pouted Mollie. "You don't think about me."

Pushing Bek's arm away she sprang from her seat on the low bed and went to the window and leaned out.

It was not dark yet, the long summer twilight was still lingering. Mollie bent forward and pulled a white rose from the bush that climbed nearly to the window-sill. There was a shadow

in Bek's eyes; it would be so long before she would see Mollie again. Oh, why had they not planned this before! It was lovely at home, but she would miss the girls and so many other things, and there would be work to do and not time for the things she loved best. This visit would be her "graduation present." She had forgotten that she would not have a graduation present. Mollie's watch and chain from her father were elegant, and this proposed European tour was to be her present from her mother; none of the other girls had anything as grand as Mollie's gifts, but every one had something beside the class ring, and she would have only that.

And might she have this if she chose? Might she have it when her mother was saying to herself, "To-morrow Bek will be here."

She was almost sure that she would not have chosen her quiet, uneventful life for herself—but she had not chosen it for herself; that was the glory and beauty of her life. Was it chosen twenty years ago? Was it not chosen from the very beginning when He had chosen her?

The bewildered thoughts in Bek's mind did not take this form until long afterward.

She was a little troubled about Mollie; the back

of her head was not very encouraging, and there was a set of the lips as she turned slightly that Bek knew of old. Mollie loved Bek better than any one excepting Ernest Vanderveer, while Bek loved several people better than she loved Mollie. Bek loved her mother better, and to-night Mollie was sure of it. Mollie once said that she hated English History because Bek cared to read it sometimes instead of talking to her.

This serious difference of opinion to-night might make a break. It was Mollie's last request and Bek would not grant it.

Bek's trunk was packed and the few last things piled upon a chair to be laid in in the morning; there was nothing to do now until bedtime but to talk, and Mollie was no longer in the mood for talking. Mollie might not be in the mood to speak again for some hours. She pulled her rose to pieces and scattered the petals, then leaned farther out, resting on the window-sill.

"Mollie!" said Bek brightly.

Mollie did not stir or speak.

"Mollie, let's go down and walk up and down the shrubbery walk just as we have done all these years, and we'll make three wishes and see if they will come true."

"I'm very well satisfied here," said Mollie, indifferently.

The quick color touched Bek's eyes and brow, she leaned her elbow against the low foot-board and tapped the carpet with the toe of her boot.

At that instant Mollie would have given her watch and chain to recall her last words; she loved Bek tenfold more than Bek knew. Bek tapped the carpet pained and hurt. Might she disappoint her mother for Mollie's sake. But her mother was weak, and the baby was not well—the little baby not a week old. How could Mollie be so selfish and inconsiderate!

The sullen look was still about the corner of Mollie's mouth; Beck would not speak again to be rebuffed.

There were her silk gloves to be mended, Lulu's white tie to be finished, and the lace to be put upon the ruffle of Floy's white apron. It was too early to light the gas, but she could not sit and do nothing with Mollie's mute uncomfortable presence so near her. As she arose and struck a match the uncomfortable presence interfered in an irritated voice:

"Don't light the gas, I beg of you; if you want to sew or read, go somewhere else."

Extinguishing the match, without a word, Bek dropped back into her old position on the bed, resting her head on the foot-board. The small room was close and hot despite the large, wide-open window; it was somewhat in confusion also: Mollie hated a "littered up" room, she wished she were home in her own airy chamber with nothing to make her uncomfortable. She might have known that this bedroom would be too small for them both to sleep in this hot night. She picked another rose and pulled it to pieces. She found something to do if Bek did not.

This evening that you see these girls for the first time, Mollie is twenty and Bek nearer twenty-one as she had drearily observed to Mollie half an hour since.

Bek's girlhood was too delicious a thing to give up lightly; she almost wanted to keep it all her life. Long dresses and putting up her hair she had fought against until the girls had laughed and teased and coaxed her into adopting a style more suited to her "years and responsibilities." It was not the years in themselves that she held herself back from; it was the girlhood that the years were taking away and the womanhood they were bringing. This dread was wholly owing to

an unfortunate remark made by one of the teachers on the first day of her arrival at Rutledge Felix. Homesick, impressible Bek never forgot it. How sorrowful and stern Miss Aiken had looked as she said:

“Girls, enjoy yourselves now, for, believe me, this is your happiest time; your *only* happy time, I am tempted to say.”

Some of the girls laughed and called her a “disappointed old maid,” but silent Rebekah neither laughed nor forgot. She wondered that Miss Aiken found so many things to laugh and talk about if she had lived through all her happy times.

But another influence was stronger in Bek’s school life: Helen Southernwood, the teacher of the senior class.

Miss Southernwood often said to the girls that her own life grew brighter every year and that she was hoping to be some day like Mrs. Sherwood, author of “Little Henry and his Bearer,” “the very happiest old woman that cumpers this earth.” Therefore, it came to pass under Miss Southernwood’s sunny guardianship, that binding the long braids into a knot or twisting the soft mass into a coil at the top of her head, meant,

not only womanhood to her, but the preparing for a happy old womanhood, and she put away childishness, but not childlikeness, with the ribbons that had tied the ends of the glossy, gold braids.

Miss Southernwood said that Bek's hair was as expressive of herself as her lips or her eyes. As it nestled against you, it was a very comforting head.

At eighteen, before she had been three months at boarding-school, her dresses were made longer and the braids caused to disappear altogether. She laughed at herself and drew a full length pen-picture of herself for her mother and Lulu. She was a little sorry that old aunt Rebekah had not lived to see the beginning of her growing up.

At home as sister-mother, she was becoming a wee bit old-fashioned, "growing just like her mother every day," Pauline said. It might be a lovely thing to be just like her lovely mother by and by; but at seventeen one does not need to be *just* like forty. But after three months' association with Mollie Sherwood and all the other girls, she was as much the modern school girl as any of them, as any of the brightest and deepest of them, as with any of the lightest

and sweetest of them. "Unspoiled" was often in Miss Southernwood's mind as she looked at Bek and listened to her. Not that there was anything negative about her; there was a great deal in her to *be* spoiled.

More than one student as bright as Bek had been graduated from Rutledge Felix, pert and self-sufficient; not lovable in womanliness, and not remarkable enough in mental culture to make a mark anywhere; the woman had been spoiled and the student was not noticeable. If Bek had not been her own sweet, unspoilable self Miss Southernwood would have feared for her. But the ordeal was safely passed, little Bek Westerly was little Bek Westerly still.

Bek was too real to be spoiled, and Gertrude Raymond, the only other Clovernook girl, just escaped being intellectual enough. In every mental race they undertook together Bek came out far ahead. Gertrude tried very hard to be sweet as well as to be bright. Bek never knew that any one had to try to be either. No training could make her superficial or flippant. The superficial and the flippant at Rutledge Felix were those that Miss Southernwood groaned most about. Bek was her comfort, her hope, her inspiration.

To see Bek in blossom was one of the things Miss Southernwood lived for. And, now, Bek's school days were ended, she was one of nineteen sweet girl-graduates, and she was going home—with Tennyson's "Princess" in the tray of her trunk and with her brain fairly buzzing with the plans of work that were crowded into it. School days were ended and she was not so very old; she would not be so *very* old until she was twenty-five, until she had turned that "first corner." Miss Southernwood called twenty-five the first corner and had thrown a halo around it. "There is usually something decided by that time," she had said. This indefinite something to be decided gave Bek a tingle from head to foot. She was so quiet, graceful, and self-possessed that few beside Miss Southernwood suspected what a little steam-engine she was. She was a little thing, standing in her slippers five feet one, and slight enough for the girls to liken her to a willow wand, with a dark, round face, and a profile with soft, full curves that was the prettiest thing about her; after studying that profile the fire and gentleness of her eyes and the fun and tremor of her lips were not in the least bit surprising. The gray eyes paled and flushed, deepening to black;

her one unchanging beauty was the fluffy gold hair that would persist in curling and waving down her neck and pushing itself over her forehead until the shining rings touched the heavy, golden eyebrows and sometimes the bright lashes.

She was "lovely" all the girls said, and "stylish" in an original, dainty way; but no one ever called her pretty; strangers oftener remarked: "How odd looking that little Miss Westerly is!" The girls thought she just escaped being bewitching and exquisite; but at twenty one has time to overtake things just escaping. Even those who thought her odd looking found her so happy and sweet that they forgot she had escaped anything. Her eyes and lips always reminded you of one brooding over some good thing that was coming true; even when they were sad or perplexed they did not forget this.

Miss Southernwood said that Bek Westerly was the sunniest Christian she knew. Miss Southernwood knew that she had not escaped anything; and Miss Southernwood understood her better than any one else in the world. Bek said wonderingly sometimes that she had never experienced a real trouble in her life; her blessings had always come just in time, perhaps because

she had a way of expecting them. Her father had died before she could say "papa," and her mother was as precious as a mother in a book,—more precious; she was a mother in real life. (But it is the real life that makes the books.) Although she was sorrowfully in doubt about herself, about her fitness to be herself, she was more than satisfied to be Bek Westerly, after all, and had never once sighed to exchange herself with Nora Reed, the beauty of the class, or with Marion Harose who wrote poetry and had it printed, with Grace Holden, the heiress, with Gertrude Raymond who always did the right thing at just the right time and who was never impulsive or rash, or even with her best friend, Mollie Sherwood who was going to Europe with her mother and then coming home to be married.

She was glad and satisfied to be Bek Westerly because only herself could learn God's secret thoughts towards herself. "I know the thoughts that I think towards you," God has said. Grace Holden was content to be herself because she had a rich inheritance, Nora Reed was rejoiced to be herself because no one at Rutledge Felix could compare with her in personal beauty, Gertrude Raymond was glad to be herself because of her

mission to set everybody else right, and Mollie Sherwood congratulated herself because of the honor of being chosen by Ernest Vanderveer.

What a poor little comfort in being herself they would have thought Bek Westerly had!

"Bek Westerly will do something unusual before she's through," Mrs. Rutledge said this very morning.

Mrs. Rutledge thought she understood girls; she had been "house-mother" at Rutledge Felix thirty-five years. But Bek was not half "through" yet, and the nature of her unusualness was not even suspected. She had not the appearance of a "wild" girl, as mischievous Mollie Sherwood had; her voice was low and as clear and sweet as the note of a thrush; her words and phrases, all her school-girl exclamations, were as refined as energetic, she had no taste for school-girl slang, and her manner—her manner was purely her own, as much an exponent of herself as the curves of her cheek and the waves of her hair; slightly defiant when opposed, a trifle saucy whether she dared or not, as frank as a child of five, self-possessed and without one atom of self-consciousness.

Not remarkable, at all, as you discover—only

Bek Westerly, a country maiden, with three years of city training, sometimes breezy, sometimes abrupt, but always a lady.

She was watching the turn of Mollie's head, the uneasiness of her attitude and that sullen twitch in the droop of her lips with a mistiness in her eyes that betokened surrender. But she knew Mollie better than you or I, and when she spoke she only said:

"I wonder if Pauline will be sent away, and I shall have to take her place."

Mollie turned, radiant and subdued. It was like Bek not to notice her mood and take up the thread where it had been dropped.

"You! Of all people! I imagine your pretty clothing switching around in that kitchen."

"My pretty wardrobe will be exhausted by and by and not soon renewed! Aunt Rebekah's money is all gone and mother has none for me. Father is always losing money and harrowing himself by risking more and losing more. He has been successful since I've been at school, I believe."

"Rather a gloomy outlook for you. I'd stay here and support myself if I were you."

"Mother needs me," said Bek simply.

"I don't see how those children have any claim

on you," Mollie ran on indignantly, "they are not your own flesh and blood."

"Do you forget they are my mother's children?" asked Bek quietly, but she colored with anger.

"But you don't care for your step-father," Mollie hastened to interpose.

It was queer, but Mollie was afraid of Bek when Bek was angry.

"Mother cares for him, and so I do. He is very kind to me. He treats me as he treats Lulu, although I am so much older. I confess I would rather stay here and teach than go home and take Pauline's place. And I *couldn't* do it. She is a strong German woman and I never washed in my life; but I can iron. Mr. Rutledge has made me a good offer and I could have this same room to myself as I've had all this time. I might take Miss Southernwood's position in time. I would be almost satisfied to do her work in the world. Oh, how I *want* to stay no tongue can tell."

"Is *that* your highest ambition?" asked Mollie scornfully. "I want to be a senator's wife."

"I hope you may," laughed Bek.

"I *would* stay if I were you. You were only four years old when your mother married again,

she likes the other children just as well; she has them, what does she want you for? I want you, Bek. I belong to you," coaxed Mollie, in her pretty way.

A tap at the door was a relief to both; Mollie sprang forward to open it, thinking that she could embrace even Miss Aiken if she proved to be the intruder.

But the lovely white head and lovely tinted cheeks were not Miss Aiken's.

"O, Miss Southernwood," cried both the girls joyfully.

Miss Southernwood smiled and approaching Bek laid her hand upon her hair.

Miss Southernwood's hand was a benediction in itself.

"Miss Southernwood! I need something! I don't know what it is. I want to come back so much—I want to be with you, I want to *work* here among the girls, I want to support myself and—there's mother!"

Miss Southernwood looked down into the eyes that lifted themselves in such earnest appeal; the tender, wistful, luminous eyes touched her inexpressibly.

Miss Southernwood would never know how she

would have loved her own child, but she knew how she loved Bek Westerly.

"I don't want my own way, and I don't know what the other way is."

"Oh, dear me!" cried Mollie, "you two people are too transcendental for me. When Bek doesn't say anything, I know what she means better than when she speaks."

"As somebody said, 'Speech is to conceal thought,'" laughed Bek. "I know I am selfish. It will be more than hard for me to stay home and take Pauline's place when I may stay here and revel in books. I worked hard before I came to school, for mother gets tired so soon; but I was always looking forward to study and teaching. And now mother seems to want me so!"

Bek brushed away a few perplexed tears.

Mollie's life was decided for her; all the other girls seemed to know just what they would do next.

"Shall I give you my help?" asked Miss Southernwood softly.

Mollie drew nearer and stood beside Bek. Miss Southernwood's voice and manner seemed a part of the twilight.

"Now that you are ready for work—so ready for

work, I want you to have my help; it was not given to me until I was twice your score of years. It helps me every hour."

Mollie looked interested; Bek's eyes were intense.

"We who believe in Christ are already living our eternal life: he that believeth *hath*—hath already, not shall have by and by, eternal life. We are already in Christ's kingdom, living out His plan, doing His bidding, keeping His word; we are doing this as really, although not as perfectly as we shall do it in His kingdom in Heaven. His kingdom is so unbounded that the place where you and I live and obey is within its limits. Rutledge Felix and Clovernook are both within its walls. If you were in Heaven to-day, you would not be anxious about doing or not doing, going or staying—there would be but one thing to do—His will. There is but one thing to do now—His will. This truth simplifies every perplexity for me. Ask Him what you may do and do it, that's all. If He permit you to make a mistake, the mistake is a part of His will, too. Don't be afraid of making a mistake, be as willing to do that for Him as anything else. You may think that you have made a mistake when you haven't at all. Do the thing

that is most like Him—the thing He would do if He were you—and rejoice with all your heart.”

Mollie looked mystified; Bek was content.

“I came to take you away, both of you. John Prentiss, who takes me home with him to-morrow; speaks to fathers and mothers and older sisters to-night in the lecture room of our church and I want Bek to hear him. He is my boy. His mother was my dearest friend, and John and Janet are very near to me. He came from Clovernook to-day, he is your pastor’s nephew, Bek.”

“Oh, *that* Mr. Prentiss! Mame Dunraven’s cousin. She has talked about his coming for years.”

“He’s your Mr. Prentiss, too,” said Miss Southernwood.

“Yes,” assented Bek, flushing.

How she had been looking forward to this meeting! Was he tall and grave and solemn? Would he make her a set speech?

“Now, girls, put on your things and come. There’s the bell this instant.” Miss Southernwood’s voice was not like the twilight now.

“It doesn’t mean me,” said Mollie. “I’m neither father nor mother nor older sister.”

"But you want to see Mr. Prentiss," persuaded Bek.

"No, I don't. I don't like people who are always telling me my duty. I'll stay here and read or go down and play for Mrs. Rutledge."

"I want to go very much," said Bek.

"Of course you do," Mollie muttered under her breath, "you don't care how much you spoil our last night."

"I don't see why you won't come," urged Bek.

"It isn't my fault that I wasn't born somebody's father or mother or older sister," laughed Mollie, "besides, I expected to play to-night for Mrs. Rutledge."

## II.

### JOHN PRENTISS.

“Is the world all grown up?”—CHARLES LAMB.

WHILE Bek and Miss Southernwood were walking slowly towards the lecture room, I must tell you how it came to pass that Bek was sent to boarding-school at Rutledge Felix and how Miss Southernwood's “boy,” the Reverend John Prentiss, had become Bek's “hero.”

He was not a hero for anything that he had done exactly, hardly for what he was expected to do, he was only a hero because, when Bek was seventeen, she had begun to make him a hero in her imagination of him. It was because of him that she was sent to boarding-school. Some one was to begin at the beginning and Bek thought that he had begun at the beginning of this, not knowing that an unselfish spot in her own grateful heart had been the real beginning. Or, perhaps, it was farther back still, that day when her fa-

ther, a little boy in his own home, had scolded somebody for not being kind to old Aunt Rebekah. She had been "old" Aunt Rebekah ever since anybody could remember. After that she went out west to keep house for a distant relative, and after the relative died she did various things that people did not know much about, and, at last, did something that everybody knew about—she married a rich old man.

Bek's father was struggling through college the day she married and after that day the struggle was ended; there was no struggle through the seminary course; even after his settlement at Clovernook, his first charge, the same old thin envelope came enclosing the same kind of a check, it came until his funeral expenses were paid, it even came until Bek's mother wrote to her that she was engaged to be married to a prosperous farmer, James Maurice.

There were neither checks nor envelopes of any kind after that; Bek's mother did not know, until Bek was fourteen, whether or not Aunt Rebekah had received that last letter. But she knew on Bek's fourteenth birthday, for there came a letter to Bek in the same upright hand.

That night in June! How well Bek remem-

bered it! Lulu was ten years old then, Chip nearly nine, and the twins, Nell and Floy, just seven. Two babies had died, and her mother was sorrowful and not at all strong. That birthday had been a crooked sort of day, despite her mother's efforts to set things straight. It was ironing day and Pauline had a sick headache and could not iron the dampened clothes, and Nell and Floy were both poisoned on their faces and hands, and it was not till five o'clock that Bek and her mother could start for the Parsonage where Bek was invited to take tea with her Sunday-school teacher, Mame Dunraven, because it was her fourteenth birthday. On the way home they found Aunt Rebekah's letter at the post-office. She remembered the anniversary and she wanted Bek to remember her.

"I am a hard, proud old woman," she wrote, "I thought if your mother could get along without me I could get along without her. But I want to hear from her and from you. I've been reading over the letter your father wrote me the very day you were born. He promised me that he would give you my old-fashioned name and there never should be any 'c' in it. There was some gratitude in his heart. My husband is dead, and his rela-

tives are all dead. I have money enough to live on comfortably, and John Prentiss, your minister's nephew, is my young pastor and comes often to see me. That is all the young life I have. I live alone with my old housekeeper. I shall never leave my home; my relations have died; I am eighty years old and I am writing this letter with my own right hand. I suppose it is not very often on the line, for my eyes get worse every day. I am as straight as I ever was and I have lost none of my faculties. Mr. Prentiss likes to argue with me. He has some young ideas—just as your father had, but he is a good friend to a friendless old woman. I never could make friends. *Do you make friends.* Your father lived to be a minister but two years; I should have visited him if he had lived. I hope to get acquainted with him before long. His home is not so far away from me as yours is.

“If you are like your father, you will write to me often. Your loving old grand aunt,

“REBEKAH HOWE MARSTON.”

“I'll write and I'll keep it up, too,” promised Bek energetically.

“I wish you would,” encouraged her mother.

"I have so much and she has so little. Mrs. Dunraven spoke of her this afternoon. Mr. Prentiss has written to them about her. He says she is as queer as she can be, and growing queerer."

"That's because she hasn't anybody to keep her from being queer," said Bek, decidedly. "I'll begin this very night to make friends."

And so she did. She began that very night to make a friend of Aunt Rebekah; very innocently and unsuspectingly, however, for she only thought of being Aunt Rebekah's friend. Aunt Rebekah's brief but speedy reply was laid away in the top drawer of her bureau to be taken out and looked at when her resolution flagged and to be kept there as a constant reminder that on every Wednesday a letter must be written to that little town in the west.

"Tell me everything about your home," Aunt Rebekah wrote. "I have lived my life, now I want to look on and see how another Rebekah lives hers."

This other Rebekah not only enjoyed living her life, but she enjoyed sharing it with somebody who seemed to have so little of life to live. She wondered if there were anything she did not tell Aunt Rebekah about. It was

dull work sometimes when fun, or work, or study pulled hard in some other direction, but Bek found it as hard to break a resolution as some people do to keep one, and then Aunt Rebekah was counting on having it Saturday afternoon, and how could she disappoint the loving old heart, and then—this spurred her on,—she was paying a debt of gratitude that her father had not lived to pay himself. He had meant to brighten Aunt Rebekah's old age, her mother said.

“Mother, I wish I could help her get some of the things she has missed,” Bek sighed one day.

“The thing she has missed most is loving people; I think she is getting some of it in loving you.”

Bek wrote every week for three years, the letters growing longer and fuller as her own life grew and was filled. Replies were rare the first year, the second year they ceased entirely in her own hand; they were simply suggestions, thanks and brief messages in a round, business like hand, signed “J. P. for Mrs. Rebekah Marston.” During the third year the messages were appreciative words and entreaties for Bek

to keep on writing. At last, after three years and ten days, when Bek was seventeen years and ten days old there came a letter from Mr. Prentiss announcing Mrs. Marston's sudden death, and stating that a legacy of thirty-five hundred dollars had been left to Rebekah Howe Westerly. It was her last request that the entire sum should be spent upon her grand niece's education; she had spoken of the boarding-school for young ladies known as Rutledge Felix where Miss Helen Southernwood taught, and if the bequest were not sufficient to defray the necessary expenses of tuition, board, clothing, incidental expenses, including pocket money, the same was to be made known to himself and the deficiency would be supplied.

Mrs. Maurice cried over the letter and Bek laughed and cried and danced and sang and hugged and kissed everybody all around.

Mame Dunraven looked wise over the letter and pinched her and said:

"So that's what you've been getting ready for."

"Aunt Rebekah doesn't know about Rutledge Felix," said Bek, perplexed.

"No, nor Cousin John doesn't, either. It's very queer about it. Bek, I had too good a time there

not to desire to send all the girls I know. Janet Prentiss was there a year, too."

It was a wonder to Bek that she contained herself while the village dressmaker was busy about her wardrobe, and she was very sure that she did not contain herself but spilled all over when Mame Dunraven sent for a circular and she read for herself the list of studies that she might revel in.

Mr. Maurice growled in a good-humored way over the sudden plan, for he loved obedient, sunshiny little Bek, and he knew how her mother would be continually longing for her.

"I can't afford this thing for Lulu and the twins," he declared, "and what then?"

"Oh, Bek will come home and teach them," said Bek's mother hopefully.

"Yes, she will! She'll come home and get married just as every other good and bright girl does."

"That *is* rather hard on you men," laughed his girlish wife.

Bek happened to overhear the protest and the repartee.

She *would* come home and teach the children; that would be one more thing to study for. She

wondered if anybody in the world had as much to live for as she had. Mr. Dunraven, had, of course, and Mr. Prentiss, but it was the physical and mental needs that she ministered unto; it would be daring and presumption for her to hope to rise to anybody's spiritual necessities. She supposed nobody ever did that excepting ministers and minister's wives.

So she went to Rutledge Felix, and oh, the joy of those years of study. It was like a breezy climb up a mountain; it was not the reaching the top, it was the climbing that gave zest to every hour. It would be a sad thing to reach the top if she might not climb any more. She climbed with winged feet. And there was always a top beyond. She reached one of the tops beyond to-night; Mr. Prentiss reached down to her a helping hand.

Was *that* John Prentiss? The hero of her dreams and imaginations! The gentleman standing in the desk was a stranger; he must be Mr. Prentiss. But he was not tall, and she admired tall men; he was dark, not a clear dark either, a mass of black hair, a forehead broad and low, black eyes, so earnest, so grave, that she became quieter with every breath, his voice stirred you;

there was something to be done in the world and you and he must do it.

Bek's heart was beating in her ears, she distinguished no word; from his eyes a hush fell upon her spirit, from his voice her spirit leaped forth to rush into conflict. Was he speaking or praying? The only vacant seat was near the desk, they made their way to it and sat down in front of the speaker. It was the night of the usual lecture, she remembered. Mr. Evans had announced last week that the subject of the next lecture would be "Sympathy with child-Christians."

Evidently Mr. Prentiss had been speaking some time; there was a thrill in the audience.

She looked up into his face and listened.

"A little daughter twelve years old was dead. Jesus came into the house, took her by the hand and said to her: 'Arise.' She arose and walked and the Lord commanded that something should be given her to eat. He had done His work.

"Now He gave the parents their something to do.

"The Lord has come into your house; He has spoken to your twelve-year-old maiden, and she

has heard His voice and obeyed. She has given herself to Him as confidingly as only children know how to give themselves, and now her ignorant, longing heart is hungry for a knowledge of Him and His words. She must be fed. Something to eat must be given to her or the child cannot thrive. As the flower is hungry for rain and sunshine, so is she hungry for the true words of God. Nothing else will satisfy her. Something else may do for the worldly Christian; but she has received the kingdom of God as a little child. Is there not something to eat in His kingdom? The Lord could give it to her without you, even as He fed the five thousand without you. But, oh, no, He did not feed the five thousand alone. How He loves to have helpers in His work of feeding. He commanded that 'something' should be given this little daughter to eat; He did not designate what, it might be anything they happened to have in the house. Anything that is in your homes to give! Anything in the home that the child was born into.

“The little Christian has a heart ache to-night. To-day, at school, one of the girls made her 'mad,' and she poured out a torrent of angry words and called her 'names.' Some one 'told'

her in the class to-day, just as the right answer was hesitating upon her tongue, and she repeated what she was 'told' and was marked perfect, her heart sinking afterward because she lacked the moral courage to refuse to be prompted. How heavy her heart is to-night! How can she be one of Christ's lambs when she is so wicked! She lingers when she bids you good-night wondering if grown-up people ever do such wicked things and stumbles through tear-blinded eyes upstairs to bed. Oh, how hungry she is for a word of comfort! But mother is finishing that dress for school wear and replies to her good night half absently: father is dozing in his arm-chair with a newspaper upon his knee. He thinks how dear and sweet she grows as he returns her kiss, but he has not any special word to say. So the poor little sinner falls asleep without any help from you. She may not know that she has missed anything. By this time she may have learned not to expect anything. Perhaps she has not missed anything; perhaps she clings all the closer to another Friend because she has no comforter on the earth. But *you* have missed something.

"It is Sunday evening and the little Christian

is weary and unsatisfied—dissatisfied over her Bible reading. Her Sunday-school teacher said to-day that Christians love to read the Bible, that their love for it is one of the evidences that they are God's children, that the Bible is His letter to every one of them. She has finished her Sunday-school book and half-stealthily she opens her Bible—no one in the room is reading the Bible and she doesn't like to appear singular—the Bible is the small, unattractive one in fine type—and she tries to read. Opening at hap-hazard she reads sleepily and confusedly; 'What advantage then hath the Jew or what profit is there of circumcision?' She reads on bewildered and self-condemned because she doesn't understand. Justified! What is that? Deeds of the law! What *are* deeds of the law? Oh, if somebody would find her a place to read or tell her what things meant! Sister Sue likes to read the Bible. She watches her as she opens her Sunday-school Bible and envies her absorbed face. She is so lost in reading that she really does not hear when the troubled little Christian bids them all good night.

"The little Christian again is grave! An awful responsibility rests upon her. At odd minutes during the last few days and in the evening half

hour after the lessons are learned she has been devouring a book lent her by one of her classmates. The classmate is a Romanist and this book was given her by her mother last Christmas. I know the book; I could tell you the name of it. Wonderfully interesting it is. The hero was a Protestant, he became a Christian and used to make such fine prayers in prayer-meeting, and then, before he was grown up, he found friends among the Romanists and they taught him how very wicked he was to be a Protestant and proved to him that he would surely be lost unless he believed in the Holy Roman Catholic Church and prayed to the Mother of God.

“She closes the book with a sigh that is almost a groan, with an uncertain look about her lips she steals away forgetting to bid any one good night. Mother forgets it, too, for she is cutting a sacque for the baby, and father is worried about business and does not look up when she passes him. Brother John is visiting one of his mission boys who is ill and Sister Mary is writing a letter to her bosom friend. Without a word of help from any one the doubting little Christian falls asleep, not daring to say any prayer to our Father who art in Heaven and not knowing any prayer to

pray to the Virgin Mary. For three nights she goes to bed prayerless, as far as words are prayer, and, then—she loves Jesus so much, in spite of the fascination of the story and the bewilderment of arguments she cannot answer, on the fourth hungry night, something triumphs, she gladly and restfully—oh, how gladly and restfully!—comes back to ‘Our Father’ and ‘Now I lay me’ and falls asleep a happy little Protestant again.

“Friends, this is not a fancy sketch. The child is a woman now, and gave me this bit of experience herself. The little Christian goes to prayer-meeting. Some of those little Christians are here to-night. She has listened to every word, she has bowed her head while prayer was being made, speaking her childish prayers: ‘Make me a good girl, don’t let me ever be wicked any more, and show me how to be good.’

“At the close of the meeting, Brother H. takes her by the hand and asks her before a group of girls and big boys, ‘My little sister, do you love the Lord?’ Poor little Christian, how can she speak with all those eyes staring at her! How her heart grows bigger and bigger until her throat smarts and aches! Her dry lips cannot frame the husky words, she draws her hand away with a

quick gesture, a tall boy behind her titters! Angry and ashamed and repentant—oh, how bitterly repentant!—she flies from them all, and rushes out into the street. She has ‘denied’ her Lord, she is just like Peter—no, she is worse a hundred times, she is just like Judas. Are such wicked people ever forgiven? Her Sunday-school teacher says that if people do not confess Christ before men He will not confess them before His Father and the holy angels. If she might only run back and shout out before them all: ‘I do, I do love Him.’ The salt tears roll down her cheeks, but her hat is pressed over her eyes and nobody sees. Mother is talking to a neighbor about the rambling prayers that Brother H. makes, and Sister Jennie is telling her sharply not to lean against her hat, to look where she is stepping.

“Oh, the trials at home and the trials at school! Oh, the sorrowful things that there is no one to listen to! Oh, the crooked things that there is no one to make straight? Oh, the dark things that there is no one to explain! Oh, the question of right and wrong in little things that there is no one to help her decide!

“Hungry little Christian! Must she wait a long time? God knows. No one else seems to know

or care. She is a happy little Christian after all. She grows up strong and sympathetic; she loves the Bible a thousand times better than Dickens or George Eliot; with a moral sense subtle and keen, she feels, without arguing, the right and wrong of every question that comes up; she can speak frankly now, to any friend, young or old, about her Master. How much she lost by early starvation she can never know, but this she does know, how tenderly the Shepherd Himself feeds the hungry little lambs. But you to whom He gave her, bidding you give her something to eat, what is your excuse?"

Bek's heart beat fast; through her full eyes she could not see his face.

What was her excuse for not going home to Lulu and Nell and Floy? Were they Christians? How ashamed she was! She really did not know. When she could listen again he was giving suggestions as to how to help the little Christians.

"By coming out of yourself; by giving yourself; by giving all there is in yourself to give; by asking more to be given you to give."

Before the benediction was pronounced she had forgotten that she did not admire her hero. He

came down to them instantly, and took Bek's hand while he was speaking to Miss Southernwood; he held it, as easily as Mr. Rutledge, the principal, might have done for two or three minutes as he talked. And then he gave her a bright look and called her Bek Westerly.

"I knew you as you entered, before I caught a glimpse of Miss Southernwood. She has told me many things about you. You and I have known each other a long time. Mrs. Marston would insist that I should read all her little girl's letters."

"Did she? And *did* you?" exclaimed Bek feeling more ashamed than she had ever felt in her life.

"Perhaps that is one reason that somebody said to me the other day: 'Mr. Prentiss, I know you were a little girl once.'"

"And if I had kept on writing somebody might have said that they knew you were a big girl once," said Bek.

"No," he answered gravely, "I should not have read a ~~big~~ girl's letters without her permission."

"I *was* a big girl," protested Bek.

"That was hard to believe. You recognized yourself more than once to-night, I know."

"Yes," dropping her eyes, "I could tell Aunt

Rebekah things because she was not real to me. It was like writing in a journal. It did not need any voice, and I can always write what I cannot speak."

"You gave yourself; it was a blessed beginning!"

Bek thought she never could keep on thus giving herself.

"I wish you were a little girl still, for my sake. And then you would write to me once in a while."

"I am not a little girl—still," laughed Bek.

Fathers and mothers came crowding up the aisles to speak to Mr. Prentiss. Bek and Miss Southernwood moved aside.

"Well, Bek?" began Miss Southernwood as Bek slipped her arm through hers as they stepped out into the street.

"I don't know," said Bek, doubtfully, "he's different from everything I supposed."

"How different?"

"I did not know there were people in the world like him."

"There are not—many. Out of a great disappointment, an overwhelming disappointment, he has come out sanctified. He is thoroughly consecrated. For years he had one aim, he worked

for it night and day and when the way was open he was jubilant in his triumph. But his eyes failed, he became almost blind, he could not study and work in Syria and he has come home and settled down to his old work in a little parish a hundred miles from here. But it almost broke his heart."

"I noticed his eyes. I thought they were lovely."

"They are. But he cannot write a sermon yet."

"That is since Aunt Rebekah died, while I have been at Rutledge Felix. I knew Mr. Dunraven had a nephew in Syria. I have wanted to know all about Mr. Prentiss, but I did not like to ask."

"All about him nobody knows. He wrote to me from Syria: 'Pray hard that I may not have to come back.' We did pray hard, Janet and I. He is satisfied now just as hard. He says he does not even want to know why he had to come back; he is just as satisfied as if he knew. He loves God and doesn't ask questions. He was interested in girls out there."

It was all in the kingdom here and there, Bek was thinking; it would be all in the kingdom, Rutledge Felix or Clovernook.

### III.

#### THE BEGINNING OF SOMETHING.

“Act upon your impulses, but pray that they may be directed by God.”—EMERSON TENNENT.

BUT where her niche was at home was hard to discover; Lulu and Chip, Nell and Floy had done without her so long that they did not seem to claim her; Pauline, an efficient middle-aged woman held energetic sway in the kitchen; and Mrs. Payson, a merry-faced widow, presided in her mother's chamber and was engaged to take care of the new baby until he should be three months' old. She had kissed the baby and heartily approved of his name, Bertram, petted her mother to both their hearts' content, she had given the children their presents and found out where they were all studying, she had told Pauline she was a jewel and she hoped she would never die or get married, she had written letters for her step-father, and now what was there to do up stairs or down?

Her mother's heart rested in her, she felt that; but she was bursting for something to do. Was it possible that the something to do was to go back to Rutledge Felix? To go back to her own cosy room, to the long, busy school-room and Miss Southernwood every day and every night. And to have years of Mollie in her married home? Mollie's new home was to be that handsome house opposite the gates of Rutledge Felix. Just the work she craved most and just the pleasure she most delighted in.

She had been at home a full month before she dared speak to her mother about teaching at Rutledge Felix, and then she did not dare, she only thought she dared.

"Bek, are you busy, child?"

Bek was sitting at the open window in her own chamber writing to Miss Southernwood when her mother came into the room and stood beside her. A frail little lady in a white wrapper with dark eyes and burnished chestnut hair; Bek's daintiness was no secret after you had seen her mother.

"Only finishing my letter to Miss Southernwood," Bek replied throwing her head back against her mother.

Bek's mother was eighteen years older than her eldest daughter, and as light of foot and light of heart as the girl herself.

She was a widow with a little daughter and engaged to be married the second time when she was Bek's age; and yet, at twenty-one Bek seemed to her such a child, altogether too young and childish to be thinking of marriage for the first time. But Bek was not thinking of it; she was only thinking how she could get back to Rutledge Felix before the term opened.

"Is she at Rutledge Felix?"

"No; don't you know? I told you she is spending vacation with Mr. Prentiss and his sister?"

"Where?"

"Sunny Plains."

"Oh, I remember. He spent his vacation here and preached for us. Bekie, daughter, what would mother do without you," she said in a changed tone, bending to lay her cheek on Bek's hair. This was a new caress; of old she had been wont to be chary with caresses. Of old she had been several things that she was not now. Was it baby's advent that had changed her so? There was a flutter in the eyes that Bek looked up into; there was a flutter in the voice.

"Bek, you are my own youth come back to me. I have felt so old without you. You are your father to me and all that other life. I have lived two lives and I think I have been two people. I want to keep you as long as I stay. Bek, don't you ever go away from me, will you?"

"Does father want to keep me, too?" she asked with a break in her voice.

"How can you ask? Does he make any difference between you and Lulu? We were planning last night how you are to teach the girls; he can only send them for one year to Rutledge Felix and there will be need of no more if you prepare them for that. Now I have you, I can never let you go!"

"Never," laughed Bek, consciously.

"When a man like your own father asks you to help him, I will let you go to the ends of the earth. Somehow I keep hoping that you will be let to do the work that was taken from me. I know I wasn't fit."

"How do you know?"

"Because it was taken away from me."

"So was Mr. Prentiss' work in Syria. I don't think that proves anything. It only proves that you had to do something else."

All Bek's idea of life just now was to "do" something. Her mother would have told you that her idea of life was to suffer something. Only three hours ago her physician had assured her that an internal trouble was eating her life away; she might live one year or two, the keeping up her strength depended upon nourishment and freedom from anxious care. When Bek looked up into her mother's eyes she read only love for herself and solicitude. When Bek's mother was a little girl people called her "brave." When she was a little girl and her father and mother had been taken away within two months of each other she had read the words of the Lord: "Be thou brave and very courageous." She had read them again when at sixteen her twin sister had died. And afterward when her heart almost broke she had tried to be brave. And now, was it possible that this was hardest of all—she must go away before very long and leave the four girls, and Chip, and the dear, new baby? A second later, she remembered her husband, but she had thought of the children first.

"Is there anything you want to do, Bek?"

"I did want to go back to Rutledge Felix to teach." The words slipped out. While her mo-

ther was asking the question she had resolved never to speak of Rutledge Felix. And yet it was so hard not to have spending money and not to know just how her wardrobe was to be made new. Her gloves were shabby now and some of her ribbons were creased and faded and—she did not like to speak of money to her mother, and she would rather go without things forever than to ask her father for a single cent.

“What for? Aren't you happy at home?”

“Oh, yes,” cried Bek, in a choked voice, “it isn't that.”

“Then what is it?”

“Oh, nothing,” she evaded, trying to laugh.

“Bek, you mustn't leave me! I must keep hold of you,” her mother exclaimed in a tone of real distress.

“I won't go, mother. I'll stay with you,” she comforted instantly.

“I'll write to Mr. Rutledge to-night that I have a louder call at home.”

“Had it gone so far as that? You will not be sorry when you remember it some day. But I came to tell you that Dr. Prentiss is here to tea.”

“To tea? Why nobody is sick and Dr. Mason comes to see you.”

"Your father has a way of expressing his admiration for him by often asking him to tea. We like him because he is Mr. Dunraven's nephew and some people say he is engaged to his cousin, Mame Dunraven. But that is because he boards at the Parsonage."

"He isn't like his cousin, *my* Mr. Prentiss, one bit. Mamma, I don't like him. He makes me shiver."

"I do not admire him, but he is a stranger and we must be kind to him. Dr. Mason laughs and says that he is such a favorite around the country that he must begin to look out for himself."

"I don't like him," declared Bek, energetically, "he is so handsome that I can't find any expression in his face. And it only changes from sullen to bright and bright to sullen, and he has a voice without any purpose in it. He is only energetic when he is angry and he hasn't principle enough to keep angry five minutes."

Mrs. Maurice looked surprised. "You have studied him to some purpose."

"I've seen him at the Parsonage. He knows I don't like him and his vanity is touched and he's determined that I shall like him. He came into choir-meeting last time: Gertrude likes his voice.

The trouble is, mother, there isn't *enough* of him." Then thinking of his cousin, she added, "It would never overwhelm *him* to give up living a life of self-denial."

"Don't be harsh in your young judgments, dear. Come down and talk to him."

"I'm stupid to-day, mamma."

"Then play. You are never too stupid to be enthusiastic about music."

"He is such a book of quotations that he makes me indignant. He isn't fair, either. He leaves out the quotation marks."

"No matter, talk to him or listen to him. Papa has a new business worry and looks grave. Stock has gone down in that silver mine out west; that is his latest craze, and he's terribly disappointed."

"I'm so sorry," Bek said sympathetically.

But "a new business worry" was an every-day story.

She scribbled, "Yours lovingly" at the end of her sheet, set her writing desk on the window sill and rising went to the long glass in her handsome dressing bureau to see if she were in order to appear before Dr. Prentiss' critical eyes. Her mother stood behind her surveying the reflec-

tion with more pride than her smile revealed. How could the dark, round face, so eager, so sweet, so wise and so innocent, but be lovely in the mother's eyes!

The fly-away hair was brushed a little smoother, a wrinkle smoothed in the crimson ribbon at her throat, and then the navy blue figure flitted down the stairway—somewhat curious to meet the stranger again.

Every word that people spoke, every breath they drew was of interest to Bek. One thing Miss Southernwood had taught her, to live a life outside of herself.

"My daughter Rebekah," her father introduced, not being aware that she had met Dr. Prentiss.

Mr. Maurice always ignored the "Westerly" in her name.

"My daughter Rebekah isn't to be talked nonsense to," mentally concluded Dr. Julius Prentiss.

With instinctive recoil she met the stranger's eyes, handsome, unwavering black eyes they were, but she did not trust them. In this thing, among some others, she believed in herself; she never fully trusted one for whom her first instinct was dislike. Three years she had tried, unsuccessfully, to like Miss Aiken. She did not love easily

It was more than dislike in this instance; she shivered and shrank from him. With this feeling against him, and the disappointment about Rutledge Felix tugging sorely at her heart she became silent and self-absorbed.

"Excuse me, please," she said, rising from the tea-table while Dr. Prentiss was still busy with his raspberries.

He lifted his eyes protestingly; she colored and frowned.

"We must have some music, Bekie," Mr. Maurice, interposed.

"I'm not in a musical mood to-night," she answered easily.

Mrs. Maurice looked annoyed and endeavored to recall her with her eyes, Dr. Prentiss was undeniably provoked and would not finish his raspberries. He showed his annoyance almost as a big boy would have done; Bek laughed all to herself and forgot his existence for the next two busy weeks. The home school had been organized and lessons begun with encouraging zest.

One morning, as she was giving her second music lesson in the back parlor, Pauline came to the door and announced Dr. Prentiss.

"I kept him waiting in the hall until I knew if you were willing to see him."

"Did you say that father is away?" she asked.

"Yes, and that you were engaged."

"That was rude, Pauline."

"He asked for you, and I said you had school every morning."

"Bring him in. I'll be through in one moment."

Pauline went away with a little grunt. Pauline was a farmer's daughter; when her father died, years ago, she gave her small share of the patrimony to her invalid elder sister and went out to service at the Parsonage. She was ardently attached to her minister and had loved Bek ever since for her father's sake. To her Bek would never be anything but her minister's little daughter. When Bek's mother married again she came to her begging for a home with her, "for Bekie's sake"—a faithful servant and good friend she had been ever since.

Nell ran her fingers along the keys and laughed—wishing Dr. Prentiss would come every music morning.

Bek lingered as long as she could and then stepped through the two darkened rooms with no welcome in her greeting. With an eagerness

that was not concealed he came forward to meet her; Bek's bow, she did not extend her hand, was even more dignified and stately than usual.

In her dreaming uneventful life at boarding-school, her ideal,—handsome, brave, honorable and good—had flitted across her vision, coloring some of the dark days, giving poetry to some of the hard prose; perhaps there was a little weakness, a fascinating sort of weakness somewhere, for this hero who was coming into her life was some one whom she must “help,” some one that would depend upon her, some one to whom she might be a spiritual blessing. In some things, therefore, Dr. Prentiss, was not unlike her ideal; she began to feel that he might have need of her.

To give, not to take, was all her dream, in these days. Afterward—in the early afterward—she called this year of her knowledge of him a lost year; in the late afterward she knew that it was not a lost year. When God gave her this year He knew what she would make of it; He knew what He would make of it for her. How happy God must be in His fore-knowledge! How happy we may be in His fore-knowledge!

Seating herself in a sofa corner she began to

talk to him concerning thoughts and things that came uppermost. Julius Prentiss was a talker, she loved talkers; he was hardly a conversationalist, she thought conversationalists a bore. I fear that she would not have appreciated Coleridge. Perhaps because she was such a rapid little talker herself.

As he watched her eyes and mouth he was perfectly aware that she shrank from him; he was determined to make her confess it, some day, at the same time that she confessed that she had more than overcome it. Life was monotonous in Clovernook; this little golden-headed thing with her bright, quick motions, her sweet voice and unexpected ways and words was altogether more amusing than chronic nervous diseases, or rheumatic fever.

Observing him as he ran on in easy talk, and listening, raising her interested eyes now and then from the crocheting she had taken from her pocket, she decided that he must be as handsome as Hawthorne or Goethe—excepting his mouth, the lines of his lips were weak, and his chin, upon close inspection, was not intellectual. As he talked about his home, his old father and mother, and his cousins, John and Janet, her

eyes grew warmer; when he gave her the story of his student life, the work was quiet in her fingers; with his very frank air he seemed revealing to her all his life.

Mark Ryerson, his most patient and attached friend—excepting always his cousin Janet,—said of him once,

“When Julius confesses that he has stolen twenty-five cents, you love him better for his penitence, and begin to hope in him, until you learn that it was a dollar he had stolen.”

He said this to Janet; Janet accused him of injustice and clung to Julius the more firmly. How could she help it? Had she not loved him all her life? Had she not covered his transgressions and mingled her tears of penitence with his when they were children together? As far as she could know them she had repented of every one of his sins. She thought she knew them all; but Mark Ryerson knew that her knowledge of them bore to the truth the relation of twenty-five cents to a dollar.

His “wildness” was one of his most touching themes, especially in talking to sympathetic women; Bek listened to several stories of sin and punishment and penitence with tears very near her

eyes. Ashamed of herself for beginning to believe in him against the instinctive protest, she chided herself for being hasty in her ill judgment.

"You may not believe it," he said at last, "but this is the seventh place I've tried to settle in. I'm just out of hospital life. It isn't the kind of life to make one fastidious. To confess the whole truth, I was—unsteady at one time. I was in with a wild set, but I broke away from them by a determined force of will and now I'd as soon swallow a coal of fire as a glass of whiskey."

Bek's eyes kindled. "Oh, I'm so glad."

"You won't give me up then without seeing what I'm made of."

"No," she said impulsively.

"I'm the kind of a fellow that needs a girl friend—a woman friend; men, some men, are too rough for my taste."

The work was moving in her fingers again; how hot the color was in her cheeks! He arose and stood watching the motions of her fingers.

"May I drop in again soon?" he asked coaxingly. "It isn't awfully jolly at my uncle's. Mame is always full of something that I don't take any interest in."

"We usually send for the doctor," Bek could not forbear replying with her naughty little laugh.

"I'm not the doctor—to you."

Bek wondered if he were anything to her.

He knew how to be very much in earnest, this man whose principle was all impulse; he knew how to give reverent and silent admiration with his eyes.

Bek had never felt admired before. He lingered and lingered, loitering about the parlors like a privileged, inquisitive child, standing before a picture for awhile, then wheeling around to talk, then stopping before the bookcase he ran over the titles of the books aloud in an entertaining and entertained tone.

"I can't pass through a room and after a glance at the bookcase give the names of the books as they stand as some one I read of taught himself to do. But I may come to it yet. I am teaching myself to observe. It will be of rare service to me. This is a goodly collection. It is something to find outside of a professional man's house. Who are the readers in this house, pray?"

"Mother reads very well and father manages to without much spelling," she answered seriously.

"You are bound to be hard on me: I won't stay

any longer. I know I'm encroaching on your school hours and I have the lasting gratitude of your pupils. I'll go and see those old ladies under the hill who do all their farm work; one of them sprained her ankle in the barnyard. I told her it was because she had no right to be there. Miss Bek," coming and standing before her, "I'm a poor man."

"I never should have guessed it."

"Is the fact so apparent?" glancing down at his shabby vest. "John and Janet were born with gold spoons in their mouths, but mine was not even silver plated. My father has not been strong all his life and now he and mother scrape along on a few acres and in an old house. And I'm no help to them. I've not seen them for ten years."

"Oh, how cruel!" exclaimed Bek.

"It is cruel," he admitted in a pained tone. "I've had to scrape along, too. I'm scraping along now."

"It is hardly fastidious in you to tell me so much about yourself," Bek returned, displeased.

"I tell you so that you won't find it out for yourself. Janet keeps mother informed of my doings and undoings—I don't know what they would

do without Janet. You see I want you to know the worst of me," he added in his frankest tone.

"As we are not in Boston, I shall not ask how much you know," she answered speaking lightly, but with moved eyes; "nor in New York, so I shall not inquire how much money you have; nor in Philadelphia, so I shall not presume to discover who your grandfather was: but as we are in secluded Clovernook where the question is—"

She flushed and hesitated.

"What?" he asked expectantly.

Her eyes moistened, her lips moved with words which she did not speak, then she answered very gravely:

"I think they ask if you are a member of the church?"

"And can *you* reply in the affirmative?" he questioned.

"Yes."

"I've had some ten or twelve years longer to think about it than you have; but I have not been thinking to very good purpose, it seems. Perhaps that is one of the reasons I was moved to come to Clovernook."

"I hope it is," she said very earnestly.

"My uncle never lets me rest. I had an idea

that you were the kind that would want to talk to me about my soul."

"Never fear," she replied, reassuringly, "I never talk to people about anything they are not possessed of."

"Now I *will* go," he laughed, turning the door-knob in his hand.

She arose with an air of dismissal. During all the interview she had not detained him by word or look. His vanity was keenly wounded; he felt that he had lost the slight advantage that he thought he had gained.

"I think I have some books that you have not," he said, speaking uneasily, "if you will kindly allow me—do you read Thackeray? You would surely enjoy Miss Thackeray; she is one of my cousin Janet's favorites."

"My time is so full, thank you, and we have the papers and magazines—father is a great reader! You are very thoughtful," she added reluctantly.

He bade her good morning with some embarrassment and hastened away. She stood a moment on the threshold of the parlor door, her hands dropped at her side, a perplexed smile in her eyes.

"Oh, dear, I'd better go back to school!" she was thinking. "I knew I wasn't grown up enough to be like other girls. How Mollie would have kept him laughing, and Gertrude would have sent him away with some kind of a new inspiration after something, and I have only been rude and offended him."

There was a light step on the stairs, and she caught a glimpse of a pink cambric wrapper.

"Oh, mamma," she cried half-comically, half-pathetically. "I don't know how to entertain one bit."

"It is a pity," smiled Mrs. Maurice.

"And a recitation is lost. I'll tell Pauline that I can't see any one in the morning again."

"O, Bek," called Floy from the top of the stairs, "the Chinese put salt and ginger in their tea. Come and hear about it."

Before a week had passed Dr. Prentiss called again, this time in the afternoon, the next time he called in the evening, and after that not a week passed, all through the summer and winter, that he did not call more than once.

Bek did not know how it was; it may be that he did not know how it was himself. Lulu had an attack of malaria in the fall, he happened to

prescribe for her and then gradually she fell under his medical supervision; the twins had scarlet fever in the winter, and he visited them every day for two weeks; and, at last, towards spring, Bek, who had never had an illness in her life, must needs take cold on a sleigh ride and have a serious attack of bronchitis. And so it came to pass, without any apparent-planning or seeming forethought, that these two people were thrown together. If she were glad to talk to him, play for him and read aloud to him at home, she could not refuse to drive with him: she accepted flowers and books that he brought her, and new music, and before she was aware—long before she was aware—the shrinking and recoil were forgotten, and, somehow—she never knew how—she was drawn to him. She had learned to care very much for his presence and companionship. One evening while waiting for him to come she learned how disappointed she would be if he did not come—if he never came again. I think she forgot to ask if God had chosen this companionship for her. This new friend was not with her in the kingdom on the earth.

Once he spoke of himself as “the natural man” and she did not shrink from him. Oh, the old

story of trying to be a blessing to him!—he said that she was leading him into the kingdom that she lived in and she believed him. I think that he believed it himself. How she thought she would choke to death the night that the minister said so sternly to her mother, with a glance towards her, “I fear that Julius is an unbeliever.” Was he warning her against him? Her mother was very quiet all the next day, and looked startled when she ran into the nursery to bid her good-bye before going on a long drive with Dr. Prentiss.

After that how she prayed for him night and day! She wrote him a long letter, she could not trust herself to talk to him, every sentence was born of prayer and tears.

## IV.

### “THAT NIGHT.”

“We will obey the voice of the Lord our God that it may be well with us.”

SHE believed him, she believed that he fully meant every word when he promised her that he would begin to pray and read the Bible and try to find out if these things were so. But she did not believe *in* him. She was not at all sure that he had not promised simply to make her happy. She was not metaphysical, and I suspect that you and I are glad that she was not; she could not reason anything about the position that she found herself in. She held out her hand to God, he kept it in His, and led her along her hard way. She never knew whether or not this part of her life were a mistake; she called it a mistake, but I think God has another name for such weaknesses—it was a weakness that was the

outgrowth of so much that was strong and pure and lovely.

Recently I read this charge against story-writers: "What do they teach? Do they teach girls how to act in like circumstances?" You may never be allowed to place yourself in a position exactly like Bek's, but if your life is not in many things akin to hers, then it is not like the girls' lives I see around me; it is not like the girl's life I myself have lived.

For a long time she was bewildered and frightened with the suddenness and the sureness of the knowledge that forced itself upon her; she could not adapt herself to it; it was contrary to everything that she had hitherto found in herself—that she could love a man like Dr. Prentiss. She had longed to be a "help" and a "blessing," but no—oh, no, not to an "unbeliever"! If he would not come into the kingdom with her, must she go outside to him?

During this bewilderment she scarcely opened a book; she taught the children, mechanically; she was in no mood to speak to any one; but it was a busy time nevertheless. The physical strain was great, so great, that Dr. Prentiss, not understanding it at all, advised a tonic.

"You need a change," he said, holding her fingers in his, "but I am too selfish to advise that."

That afternoon she called upon Gertrude Raymond; if she dared tell Gertrude, perhaps Gertrude might help her. Gertrude gave such thoughtful answers in Bible-class, and Mr. Dunraven had once said that Gertrude Raymond was a wonderful Bible student. Bek's fancy-work was in her pocket, she drew it out as they sat over the wood fire in the parlor and talked. How they talked and laughed over school reminiscences, and village news!

"Girls *are* happy creatures," said grandfather in the sitting-room as the sound of light laughter came to him.

But his old eyes were too dim to discern the anxiety in Bek's eyes or the trouble that now and then flitted across Gertrude's fair face.

Gertrude could never confess her trouble, she was climbing—being burdened also, for she loved Dr. Prentiss and had faith in him; during a long illness of her mother's he had called professionally every day, and every day had given a special half hour to Gertrude. But his attention to her had ceased with his calls upon her mother, and

she knew that she had given her love to one who had not in sincerity sought it. Report had given him to Bek Westerly, but she would not believe it; this afternoon Bek made no allusion to him and she was too proud and self-suppressed to speak his name.

As twilight gathered Bek was persuaded to remain to tea, perhaps Gertrude would walk part of the way home with her and then she might ask her—what? After all, what question was there to ask? Miss Southernwood—but Miss Southernwood would not look upon it from her standpoint as Gertrude would do.

“Come out into the sitting-room while I set the tea-table,” said Gertrude, “mother is upstairs with a headache, but grandfather is there.”

The homely pleasant sitting-room, with the fire in the Franklin, the plants in the window, and grandfather in his arm-chair, was a heart's-ease in itself. Bek almost wished that she lived in Gertrude's home and never had a heart-ache—like Gertrude.

“‘And that night they caught nothing.’”

Grandfather had a fashion of reading half aloud. He was sitting close to the window to catch all the light that was breaking through

the gray, September sky. He repeated dreamily: "And that night they caught nothing."

The words were in harmony with Bek's mood, for, had not she, like the disciples, toiled all night and taken nothing? She was lost in the depths of a chintz-covered "barrel chair" and her eyes were on her quick moving fingers as the crochet needle played in and out among the scarlet loops of Bertie's sack, but her heart was with the words grandfather was reading from the big book upon his knees. The type was large. Sitting beside him, as she raised her eyes now and then, she could follow the record easily. Bek loved to pray. It was as easy as to breathe. But she did not love to help make the answer; that was not as easy as to breathe; it was as hard as hard work. With the praying must come effort, the effort of spoken or written words, the effort of using our best wisdom in planning and effecting, the mighty effort of loving with the love that suffers long and is kind; and who would not rather run and tell the Lord Jesus that we have a sore heart for a friend and beg Him to do all that is fitting to be done, than to do these hard things ourselves? But she could not pray without working, and how faithfully she had

done both all this past year! Were the disciples discouraged after their one disappointing night as she was after her long night of praying and hoping and working?

Through the open door into the kitchen she saw Gertrude moving about in her green cashmere and ruffled white apron; how pretty the soft color in her cheeks was and how much character was expressed in every step and motion! She would never find herself in such a strait as hers! She had so much character and decision, and always knew what to do next! She would never have permitted an unsatisfying friendship to glide into more unsatisfying love.

"I'm such a weak, crooked, little, purposeless thing," sighed Bek.

Gertrude sang softly while she cut bread, opened a can of blackberries, chipped the dried beef and arranged the pretty, old-fashioned china.

"This cup and saucer is an heirloom," she exclaimed, bringing a deep saucer and small, round cup to Bek. "It has a history. This summer, while I was on the coast of Maine among mother's relatives, one rainy day I went up into the garret to hunt up things to bring home, and I found an old will in a chest and copied it for

mother. The will was made by mother's grandmother's mother, and in it she willed a set of ware to which this belongs to mother when she was a little girl. This is all that is left; mother never cared for it and she's given this to me. I gave Dr. Prentiss a cup of tea from it one night and he said ever so many funny things about it. Now you shall have it to-night. It's one hundred and fifty years old!"

"I shan't think of anything funny to say," replied Bek, examining the saucer.

"He says them without thinking," said Gertrude. "Which kind of jelly will you have, currant, quince, grape or apple? that's all I made this summer."

"I should think that was enough. Pauline wanted me to learn and I wouldn't. I give six music lessons a week beside having other studies. I wish I did have more to do, though."

"So do I," responded Gertrude, energetically. "I am wondering what new thing I shall do this winter to fill my mind up. I'll give you the grape, that's on a lower shelf."

Bek laughed and took up her work again.

Gertrude went after the grape jelly and Bek's eyes wandered to grandfather's book.

"Children, have ye any meat? They answered him: No."

Their night was ended; because morning had come and the Lord stood upon the shore. He knew how hard they had worked all night; He knew they had caught nothing. They were not fishers of men now, they were only catching fish to eat and to sell, for themselves, their wives and their children, and perhaps to cast a mite into the treasury. Peter and John could not plead that it was all for Him, as they could have done afterward, when they went up to the temple together at the hour of prayer and found the lame man at the Beautiful gate. This toiling all night was for Him, only as everything is for Him, but it was for themselves as well. The thought came to her that this was not what people call "spiritual" work. Perhaps hers was not either, in its fullest sense; perhaps she would not have prayed as zealously if Dr. Prentiss were some one else's friend, Gertrude's for instance, or if she knew that he was engaged to be married to that cousin Janet that he used to like to talk about. And, foolish child, as she was, she had been almost jealous of that cousin Janet.

The Lord came to them, and their work was

not "spiritual," her heart should no longer be rent, her tears should no longer fall in scalding drops because human love and sympathy were mixed in with her beseeching prayers. The Lord found no fault with them, not one word, because of the toiling, fruitless night. He told them where to cast the net and promised they should find. Oh, if morning would only come and she could see the Lord and He would not rebuke her, but recognize all her urgent praying as He recognized their work: "Have ye any meat?" He asked.

She drew nearer grandfather's shoulder and read the question.

If He should ask her: "Have ye any answer to your prayer?" she would be compelled to answer, "No."

But how soon they were rewarded! One obedient moment was more fruitful than a long night of toil. How full the net was as they drew it in! Oh, if she might have one obedient moment! But was it all disobedience? Must she not give herself to this new friend while he wilfully stayed outside the kingdom?

The promise was if they obeyed; they had to cast the net where He commanded before they could find. Could she be obedient and marry

Dr. Prentiss? Did not his uncle, her dear old pastor, mean something when he gave her that warning look?

"Now, good people, come to tea," Gertrude was saying, cheerily, "and mother is coming down to see you, Bek; she says you will cure her headache."

The tea-table was a relief; Gertrude's housekeeping was perfection; it was a relief to lose the consciousness of herself in the delicious bread and to talk to Mrs. Raymond about bread-making and give her some of Pauline's experiences; the blackberries and the grape jelly were suggestive of so many things that Mrs. Raymond liked to talk about that the nervous headache was speedily forgotten, and then Bek had the latest news from the Parsonage; she knew how many jars of everything Mame Dunraven had "put up," and just the colors Mrs. Dunraven had harmonized or contrasted in the latest block of her silk quilt, and she could relate the last incident of church work that Mr. Dunraven had brought from the fall Presbytery; she was not so clear about the doings of the "missionary that came near being blind," but she had Miss Southernwood's vacation letters to quote from and was surprised that she was so

much at home in the details of the life at the Sunny Plains Parsonage.

"I'm real glad you came, Bek," the old lady said, when Bek shook hands with her. "Gertrude mopes sometimes—she doesn't go out half enough—and you have chirked her up."

The girls sauntered down to the gate with linked arms; Bek had no question to ask, grandfather's book had answered her question; Gertrude was talking rapidly about some new fancy-work she intended to introduce at the next meeting of the Foreign Mission Band. "The missionary that came near being blind" had organized the band on his last visit to Clovernook, the girls were to have a fair at Christmas, the proceeds of which were to be sent to his old field, in Syria. Bek had been chosen president; she liked to think that she was doing something for Mr. Prentiss, her old friend, as well as for Syria.

The sound of wheels grazed the grassy walk outside the gate; both girls looked up to bow to Dr. Prentiss. "I've been forgetting your mother, lately, Miss Gertrude," he said. "I'll run in a minute. Miss Bek, let me take you home."

"Thanks, I don't want to lose my walk," she returned seriously.

As he looked down into her eyes, with his intent gaze, it was very hard to believe that trying to be a blessing to him was disobedience. But she must decide; she must *know* if she were disobedient. She cared to be obedient more than she cared for him.

Dr. Prentiss gave a short, disappointed laugh as he leaped to the ground; Gertrude's face was radiant.

Bek went on without turning to look back; she had enough to think about.

## V.

### THE SECRET IN AN OLD BOOK.

“No man was ever so much deceived by another as by himself.”—LORD GREVILLE.

A WEEK afterward, one afternoon, she came downstairs dressed for a drive; her eyes were something to see; her own life seemed wondrously beautiful to-day, she was doing such happy and precious work; Dr. Prentiss was really *changed*, he assured her that he had never felt such an exhilaration in his life.

“I feel so free—as if I were treading on air.”

Bek never questioned the wherefore. Was not his joy the same as her own? Had he not missed a call that he might attend church last Sabbath evening? Was there not a reverent look in his eyes while Mr. Dunraven was speaking? Oh, Bek! poor Bek! poor little Bek, don't comfort yourself so! He is free and as light as air because his cousin Janet has released him from their five-

years' engagement and he has told her that it is because he wants to marry you; in his present mood he could go to church all day long for your sake, and the look in his eyes came from thinking of you; he did not hear one word the minister said. But how could you know this? You believed him when he told you that he was not the same man that he was before that morning call that interrupted your music lesson. You believe him when he tells you that you are his good angel: you believe, with a perplexed frown and a doubt at your heart, when he finds it in the Bible that the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife. Has he misquoted? No; she looks and reads with her own troubled eyes. But does it mean *that*? He rapturously assures her that it means just that and she promises—oh, how her heart beats when she promises—that she will think of it and decide. “When a woman deliberates, she is lost,” he quotes with an exultant laugh.

But she does not even smile. Must she go outside the kingdom to him? He has written to her since again and again, and his letters seem almost—she did not dare think “inspired,” but she felt it.

With one of these "inspired" letters in her pocket she was running down the stairway this afternoon.

"How the child blossoms and blooms!" her mother thought to herself as she opened the front parlor door and met her in the hall.

"Whither now, Bekie?" she said aloud.

"Anywhere and everywhere," Bek cried airily. "Dr. Prentiss has a call to make four miles away, and I am going with him."

The radiant face clouded at the changed expression of her mother's face.

"Why, mother, don't you *like* to have me drive with him?" she asked in sheer surprise. "You haven't said one word against it all this time."

"I am not satisfied to have you go with him, dear."

There was an undeniable gleam of anger in Bek's eyes.

"Then why did you not say so before?"

"I think I trusted too much to your common sense. I don't know why common sense should fail a girl in these matters and no others. Do you?" The tone quieted her.

"No," she said slowly, "but I think it does—sometimes."

"His uncle and aunt are uneasy because you give him so much of your time, and they don't know half how much time you do give him. Bekie, if I thought you cared for him—I don't know what I should do."

Her mother's lips grew white and she leaned against the wall as if to support herself.

If her mother thought she cared! And she expected to promise to marry him this afternoon.

"Have they *said* so—to you?"

Bek's lips were as white as her mother's.

"Yes."

"I don't see why," she said, the old perplexity coming into her eyes and fashioning itself into a frown. "You must see, mother—how he has changed."

"I see need enough of change now—Bekie, child, it is his *purpose* that is not right; his worldliness is at variance with every breath you draw."

Bek knew that.

Mrs. Maurice straightened herself and the color flushed back into her face. When she was to leave Bek so soon too!

"Mamma, you don't feel strong to-day," cried Bek throwing both arms about her.

"No, not very," said her mother with a sob in her throat.

She scolded herself for her childishness; but was not Bek her very life! And how she had prayed that she might leave Bek with a husband like the husband of her own youth. But Bek was more self-reliant than she had been.

"Oh, mother, mother," all her long conflict was in the cry. "When he is away from me, I think I believe in him, but when he comes I am not satisfied. I am not satisfied with *him*; but I thought—perhaps—it was such beautiful work—and he needs me—"

"Has he said so?"

"Yes," murmured Bek drooping her head.

"My dear child."

"Mother, I didn't hurry it. I didn't want it—it came, somehow. And I have fought and fought against it."

"And prayed about it?"

"Yes," she whispered.

Oh, how she had prayed about it! And her mother could speak of it so quietly.

"Don't think God shows you what to do before He does show you. Let some of the answer come through me. I forbid you, I *forbid* you, remember,

to accept him until we know him well and trust him better. Let what I say—what your mother says and your own father would say the same—be God's delay in showing you what to say to him. I would be happier if you would refuse him, unconditionally. Oh, to think that my child, that your father's child, should ever want to marry one who does not believe in Jesus Christ."

Never in her life had Bek heard her mother speak with such vehemence. She had not been a talking mother; now, when it was too late, how she wished that she had been! Bek had always been one of the hungry children that Mr. Prentiss had pictured that night. If she had been fed with the truth all along the years she never could have seen anything to be attracted with in Julius Prentiss. Vaguely her mother felt this. But her lips must be unloosed now; they would so soon be still.

"Can you not stay at home to-day?"

Bek's rebellious heart said "no," but she was silent.

Why might not God have answered her prayers already? Why must she take her answer in this way through her mother? Through her mother's misunderstanding of him and prejudice against him, it might be. And then, Bek's heart arose in

triumph, was her step-father a Christian and had not her mother married *him*?

"Mother," her voice faltered, that was not triumphant, "father isn't a Christian and you married him!"

"Yes, dear, I know it. And that is one reason that I do not want you to do it. For a long time I walked in the dark—that's one reason that I haven't been a better mother to you—he would not go with me and in many things I went with him, on the world's side. Oh, Bekie, marriage is too happy a thing to be spoiled like this!"

"But — mother — the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife," faltered Bek.

"My husband has not been, although he's a dear, good husband to me. That comfort is given to *wives*, remember, they are not bidden to leave their unbelieving husbands, St. Paul was writing to the married wives who became Christians after they were married; he was not writing to Christian maidens choosing husbands. He would bid you to marry 'only in the Lord.' Don't you know he would? Don't you know what the Lord Himself bids you?"

"Yes," whispered Bek.

But Dr. Prentiss had said that she was a power

for good in his life! What would become of him if she took herself away from him?

"Bek, do you promise?"

Her mother's tone meant that she should promise.

"Promise what?"

"Not to accept him, at present."

"I don't know," said Bek.

"I would rather that you would not go with him to-day in your present mood."

"What is my mood?" laughed Bek.

It was a relief to know that she could laugh again. She had never disobeyed her mother in her life.

"Mother, can't you trust me?" she asked, coaxingly.

"No."

"I don't see why not."

"Because your heart is on his side. You would promise before you knew it, and then, by and by, have to be a promise-breaker."

"Have you any reason beside a *feeling* for not trusting him?" Bek asked, afraid of the answer her question might bring.

"Yes."

She picked at the trimming at her mother's sleeve; her lips could not frame "what reason?"

"His uncle says that he is a mass of selfishness, that he is utterly without any principle, that he is fickleness itself—"

"I don't believe it," Bek burst out.

"Don't you believe Mr. Dunraven?"

Bek thought a moment. How could she not believe Mr. Dunraven?

"I want you to be moved by the right and wrong of it."

"I am—by the right of it. Whatever he is, he isn't fickle! He has told me plenty of times that he never saw any one before he saw me."

"It was not a pleasant thing for Mr. Dunraven to do, was it?"

"No," acknowledged Bek.

"He called this morning while you were in the schoolroom; from something Dr. Prentiss said he gathered that he was engaged to you."

"He isn't," said Bek, impetuously.

"Bek, will you stay home to-day?"

"I—don't want to."

"Some day when you look back you will be glad that you did it to please mother."

"Oh, don't speak like that! I *will* stay. When I am sure that he is weak and wicked, I'll give him up; but I do want to be sure."

"You will be sure. Mr. Dunraven says that he never behaved himself before for such a long time in his life. He is hoping for him and trying to help him. He is the one to help him; *you* are not. It grieved him to say this to me, but he did not dare to keep it from me. He was your father's friend and he is a true friend to you. He says that it would not hurt him so much to bury you as to marry you to Julius Prentiss."

Bek hid her frightened eyes. Was she saved just in time?

"Mamma! Mamma!" called Floy upstairs.

There was always some one calling. Bek hurried up to her own chamber and locked the door. Then she stood still and did nothing. What was there to do? She tore the golden and crimson autumn leaves from the front of her dress and scattered them on the carpet; she had gathered and arranged them for him; now, if Mr. Dunraven had spoken true, she never could do anything more for him. She must go to sleep and not think of him and awake in the morning and not expect him. What was there to live for any more? Nell's feet were on the stairs and her teasing voice at the door.

"Here's a letter from the indefatigable letter

writer, he gave it me just now and said to tell you that he was sent for in another direction and could not go to Maple Hill until to-morrow."

Mischievous Nell waited to see her tear open the envelope and then ran away laughing. The letter was dated the evening previous; he began by saying that his heart was overflowing and he must pour it out to her.

His cousin Janet had piles of letters with this same original expression in them, but how could Bek know that? The first long page was written enthusiastically; it was a description of the perfect night in which he was writing: the diction was elegant, the thoughts the outgrowth of spiritual life, every phrase was the expression of a mind attuned to God's mind.

Not waiting to read it all, with eyes alight, she flew down-stairs to her mother.

"Mother, let me read this to you," she cried, excitedly.

Mrs. Maurice pushed her pattern aside, laid the scissors on the table and drew Bertie closer to smooth his curls while Bek read her letter.

"And now you can judge what stuff his heart is made of—and his intellect," she cried, "see if you ever heard anything finer."

Mrs. Maurice listened intently as Bek read in a breathless manner. Her elocution, certainly, did not give any finish to its beauty. She looked up once with a glance of triumph; but her mother's eyes were fixed on the top of Bertie's head.

"Isn't it glorious, mother?" she asked, holding the sheet carefully so that her mother might not catch the effusive beginning.

"It certainly is."

"Isn't there refinement in it?"

"Yes."

"And culture."

"More than enough."

"And spirituality?" with a little triumphant nod.

"Certainly enough."

"Then you have changed your mind!" she cried, jubilantly, "oh, I *wish* I dared read it to Mr. Dunraven."

"I wouldn't advise you to."

"Why not? Wouldn't he admire it?"

"Probably he has, for years. Your father read that to me twenty years ago and more. Come with me and I will find it for you in one of your father's books!" Her mother pushed

her work from her and without glancing at her went into the back parlor and there in the book-case found the book. If Dr. Prentiss had cultivated his observing faculties to the point that the magician he quoted had done he would have known that the book was there. Crushed, at last, Bek waited, without speaking or stirring. Her mother placed the open book in her hand and then stooped to take her paper pattern from under Bertie's feet. Surely enough there it was word for word; even the punctuation was copied. And one word spelled in the old-fashioned way he had spelled in the old-fashioned way. And he had affirmed that the thoughts came to him as he thought of her and gazed out into the night.

Slowly turning, with the letter in her cold fingers, she went away upstairs again. She was trembling with anger. To think that he should dare deceive her so! Without reading the third and fourth pages she tore it into fragments. She sobbed with anger a long while, and then she sobbed with real grief; the tea bell found her too ashamed of herself to present herself before them all, and she sent word down by Floy that she had a headache.

But morning found her calmer; of course, he

intended to tell her that he had done it to tease her, had he not laughed at her last week and said that she was as trying as a book of quotations always open. And, of course, he had done this to test her; she wished though that her mother had not seen it, for she would not accept any excuse! And if her mother had not discovered it how would she have known? She heartily wished that the book had been destroyed years ago and then she would not have had this new doubt of him in her heart.

It was two days before he called, even with this intervening time Bek could not greet him as lightly as usual.

"Oh, how could you tease me so?" she asked almost immediately.

"How?"

"Don't you know how?" she asked seriously.

"No," he answered wonderingly.

"Haven't you written anything to tease me?"

"Why, no, why should I?"

"Think! Think carefully! In that last letter."

"That last letter," he repeated.

"You copied something," she hesitated, "about the night."

A look of surprise, then of anger, and then,

quickly collecting, and re-collecting himself, he laughed.

"Oh, that! I knew you would detect that! But I thought I could deceive you. I know you keep a library of quotations in your pocket."

"I was so angry that I wouldn't finish the letter."

"I am glad it affected you so much. You will never know what you have lost."

"No," she said slowly, "I know what I have lost."

"Your faith in me, you mean," he returned impatiently. "Why will you not take my word?"

"I don't know; I can't."

"Stuff! Don't be ridiculous. I tell you it was a joke and that's the end of it."

She went to the piano and sat down; she could not trust herself to talk, she could scarcely trust herself to touch the piano; he wheeled an armchair to the end of the piano and sat with his face averted and shaded with his hand. The defiant expression of his lips troubled her. There was nothing more to be done; she would do her best to believe him, but how pitiful that poor little best was! Her soft playing seemed to irritate him more and more and when she

burst into one of Janet's favorite marches he sprang to his feet and threw up his arms.

Had he risked all and lost all; he had given up his cousin Janet and he had not gained Bek Westerly!

The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light, but, oh, what a fool he had been!

"Bek, I'm going," he said in a husky voice, standing behind her. "Your music sets me wild. When you are willing to take my word send for me and I will come."

"Yes," she said, not turning to him.

"Promise me that you will write to me—"

"Yes."

"I will wait a lifetime for it," he said in a suppressed tone.

"There will be no need."

He would have spoken eagerly but she interrupted him:

"I will think and—write to you—some day!"

"Poor child! poor little girlie," he said tenderly, "for your own sake I hope you will never believe in me. But I shall be lost without you."

He went out into the night with the picture of the golden-headed girl at the piano; the

troubled lips and wistful eyes followed him many days.

And she, for many days and nights her mind and heart were in a turmoil. Everything went on just the same: studies, work and outside amusement and occupation; her mother grew slighter and more feeble, less able to be about the house, but Bek did not notice it. She was wholly absorbed in her own perplexity.

A sudden resolution came to her, it was a wild, unheard of step to take, but the idea seized and possessed her; this was two months after that night that she had let him go away. He had not called since, and she had not met him at his own home, the Parsonage, having arranged her visits so that he would be absent; to stay away from Mame Dunraven altogether she did not dare. Twice he had happened to call upon Mrs. Raymond while she was there, but it was not difficult to make an errand to another part of the house, and Gertrude never suspected that she felt it embarrassing to meet him.

"The new doctor likes to talk to Gertrude," grandfather remarked one evening to Bek.

"Everybody likes to talk to her," Bek replied.

But this sudden and wild resolution did not come of anything she learned there or at the Parsonage, it was inspired by a remark of Mr. Dunraven's in an afternoon call upon her mother. Bek had not even noticed that the minister called every Thursday afternoon to see her mother.

The remark was this: "Weighty questions demand weighty consideration." Another time she would not have remembered it; but a weighty question was pressing all the gladness out of her life.

This resolution was to write a letter to Mark Ryerson, Dr. Prentiss' "great friend," and ask him to prove to her mother and Mr. Dunraven that Dr. Prentiss was a good and true man. Dr. Prentiss had once said of Mark Ryerson:

"He would pluck out his right eye sooner than tell a lie."

She perfectly remembered his address; without revealing too much, she could ask him to write to her all he knew of his friend, Dr. Prentiss.

"I know she will never yield," Dr. Prentiss said once, grimly to himself, remembering the set of her lips that last evening, and then he smiled to think of the fun there would be in

her eyes if he should tell her of the native Australian suitor who throws a club at the maiden of his choice, she never yielding until she is knocked down.

"How can I prove myself what I am not," he thought bitterly, "how can I become what I would be for her sake?"

Meanwhile Bek was trying to decide if she might write such a letter. Who ever heard of such a thing as writing such a letter to a stranger? But it was her only hope; who else could help her? She dared not write it, and she did not dare not to write it. But it must be written or her courage would utterly fail.

With a desperate effort she dropped into a chair and opened her writing desk; she trembled, her fingers dropped the pen; she leaned back in her chair—the slow tears rolling down her cheeks.

"It isn't wrong to do; God doesn't think so," she cried aloud, "I *will* do it."

Hurriedly her pen sped over the paper. There was no attempt at a beginning.

"I hardly know how I dare write to you; it must be because I do not dare not to write. I know only one thing about you: that you speak

the truth. I am writing to you to convince my mother more than myself. I write it because it is the only way out of a great difficulty. Dr. Julius Prentiss once spoke to me of you as if he trusted you. He said you had known him all his life and had been his great friend. Will you please write to me and tell me all you know of him? He is a perfect gentleman, an excellent physician, and a favorite in the village. His uncle, Mr. Dunraven, is our pastor; he does not think him trustworthy, and has influenced my mother to believe as he does. But I can't help hoping they are both mistaken. He is very unhappy at times, and I am sure he is bearing some heavy burden; he confessed that he was, but said my decision would help him bear it, and make his way clear. Please write immediately. I cannot rest until I hear from you. My father died before I could speak; I have no one to help me in this thing. I am resolved to be obedient; all I want to know is the thing that God wants me to do. If he is not a good man, but if he is weak and wicked, I may be unhappy, but I will not— Pardon this intrusion, and help me as I would help some one belonging to you if I could."

She signed her name; there was nothing else to say. Her fingers trembled so exceedingly that the closing lines were scarcely legible; the name and address upon the envelope were so crooked that she threw it aside and used another.

It was nearly dark on a November afternoon when the letter was finished; it was a long walk to the post-office, and she had never walked such a distance alone after dark. But there was no alternative, Chip was spending the night from home; she could not ask the girls to go with her, for Lulu had a cold; and the twins were in her mother's chamber amusing Bertie. She could not sleep unless the letter were on its way; if she should give it to the driver of the mail-stage in the morning, he might forget to mail it for a week, as he had once forgotten a letter to Mollie. It was most cruel to keep Dr. Prentiss in this long suspense, and she could not decide until she knew surely—

What did she want to know surely?

She was so weary and bewildered that she scarcely remembered what it was that she was so urgently seeking to discover. It was something to satisfy her mother; something to help some one who loved her to be happy and good.

Up there in God's kingdom there were no puzzling troubles like this; every one was true and to be trusted; her sorrow now had come upon her because she had so far linked herself with one who was outside the kingdom. She knew he was outside, he acknowledged it himself. Would she go outside with him? No one beside the Holy Spirit could give him eternal life, could bring him inside the kingdom where she was. Why not destroy the letter? Why not write to Dr. Prentiss instead and tell him that she was sure God had not chosen him to be her husband?

Lingering at the gate with the letter in her hand, she hesitated, she grasped it in her fingers to destroy it, but something withheld her; the letter was in God's plan somewhere, if not to help her in this, to help her in some other thing. She did not think this; it is I who am thinking it for her—and for you.

Every moment it was growing darker, some time ago the sun had gone down behind the square white tower of the church at Clovernook; the November twilight was deepening into starlight. It was not pleasant to think of the dark mile homeward. She had not yet faith enough

to see clearly in the dark. She might send it to-morrow, after all what difference would one day make? It would be only one day more. To her young heart, hot and restless, the one day more stretched on endlessly.

"He that believeth shall not make haste." But Bek's faith was not perfect yet. The air touched her with a chill as she hastened on; a storm had been threatening all day. The long, dark mile was passed; out of breath she stood at last upon the steps of the post-office. A touch upon her shoulder startled her; she drew back, hushing the cry that had come to her lips.

"Excuse me," said Dr. Prentiss, "I thought you heard my step. May I do your errand for you? It is not fitting for you to be here alone."

"I know I am foolish, but I had a letter to mail and ran away with it myself," she said.

"That *was* foolish. May I mail it for you?"

"Yes, please. No, thank you," she added withdrawing the letter as she was about placing it in his hand.

"Can't you trust me even with a letter?" he asked bitterly.

"I can't trust any one but myself with this,"

she returned, hastily. "Are there many men in the store? I don't like to stumble over men and small boys?"

"As many as usual."

"I will take it. Excuse me," glancing into his embarrassed face as the light from the store windows fell over it, "you may think it a freak; it is only a secret."

Brushing past him, she entered the store and deposited her letter. She caught her breath—it was done now, it was on its way, there was nothing to do except the hardest doing of all—doing nothing at all.

She stepped out on the low, long piazza and found Dr. Prentiss waiting for her.

"May I walk home with you?" he asked with his assured manner.

She turned to look at the long line of dark road.

"You are afraid," he asked, smiling. "You did not count the cost of coming."

"I did," she answered slowly, "I am not afraid. Good night, and thank you kindly."

"Do you think that I will let you go alone?" he asked reproachfully.

"Yes, if you can't help yourself!" she laughed slipping away from the hand that detained her.

Dr. Prentiss was biting his lip with vexation; he was curious about that letter and had determined to discover its destination. At one glance as it almost touched his hand he had caught "San Francisco."

"I cannot understand why you will be so rude to me," he answered angrily.

"I can. It is one of the things you must believe without understanding," she said demurely.

An old-fashioned two-wheel chaise at that instant drove up to the piazza, an old-fashioned head looked out and called:

"Hurrah! My mail please."

"O, doctor!" exclaimed Rebekah, eagerly, "*are* you going my way and *will* you take me home?"

"What are you here alone for?" he inquired good-humoredly.

"To have a drive with you," she retorted with pretty promptness.

"Jump in, then. Excuse me for not getting out to help you in. You are spryer than I am."

A boy came out with the doctor's letters and papers, Dr. Prentiss gave them to the doctor and assisted Rebekah as she stepped into the low chaise.

The old doctor made room for her, pushing sev-

eral packages out of the way under the seat, Dr. Prentiss tucked the robe about her feet, lifted his hat without meeting her eyes and said good night.

"Good night," said Rebekah, lingering over the simple words.

It *was* hard to be rude to him.

"O, doctor! Dr. Prentiss!" she called, as the old doctor spoke to his horse. "In my hurry I forgot to stamp my letter! Will you stamp it, please?"

"With pleasure," he answered gravely.

"I'm so sorry," she exclaimed, indignant with herself.

"I came opportunely, it seems," said Dr. Mason, as he turned the horse's head toward the dark road she had been so afraid of a moment before.

"Yes, sir," replied Rebekah, absent-mindedly.

"That young man is bound to succeed. As a stroke of policy I intend to take him in with me—to make a trial of it, anyway. I am getting too old to go out nights."

What would her mother think of this? Dr. Mason was considered the ablest physician for miles around and had the largest practice.

"I suppose I might as well," added the doctor

with a low chuckle, "he comes every other night to sing with Nettie, and she will if I don't."

How Rebekah's eyes shone in the dark! This was how he was consoling himself in his waiting time! In this waiting time when her heart was aching so!

## VI.

### BEWILDERED.

It was fully four weeks—every day and night of four weeks, every waiting hour of four weeks—since she had mailed the letter, and for aught that she had received in reply it might as well not have been written. She drew long breaths when she was alone brooding over her disappointment and conjuring all possible reasons for the delay; no, it was delay no longer, it was positive, absolute and most cruel denial; if Mr. Ryerson were living, what reason could he have for not noticing the letter? Did he think it not worth a reply? Was her letter bold and unmaidenly, unwomanly? Had she done a thing that no other girl would do? Did he despise her and laugh at her? Would he want any one to treat his sister so shamefully? Or his wife, or daughter? It would be easier to give up all hope of ever hearing than to bear this suspense.

If it were not for being housekeeper while her mother was confined to her chamber with a heavy cold, and if it were not for the music lessons and Nell's French and Chip's Latin, and her class in Sunday school and the Foreign Mission Band of which she was president, and her letters to Mollie and Miss Southernwood, she would have had time to be very miserable.

She was too young and strong to be heavily burdened and she had faith in God. He would not let her be put to shame, for she had trusted in Him.

And, then, she did not believe in Dr. Prentiss as fully as she tried to persuade herself that she did believe. She was sure that if she accepted his love, his protection, his companionship, she would be hungry for something better all her life. And yet, because the better thing was not at hand she was tempted to satisfy herself with this lesser thing. Just as if God does not know what will satisfy us, and is not seeking to make us hungry for it and ready for it. Girls, you do not know what you lose by not waiting for the best thing.

Day and night she reasoned with herself, talked to herself, and replied to herself, and the conclu-

sion was ever the same,—Mr. Ryerson thought such a letter beneath his notice; she was bold and unwomanly to write thus to a stranger; he pitied her and laughed at her! If he had any dreadful thing to tell her he would surely write and save her! Perhaps the letter was lost. But why should that be lost more than any other? Mollie, having known all from the beginning, suggested some new combination of circumstances twice a week, but none of them had any weight with her; Mollie was sentimental and romantic, and Rebekah was neither. The letter was a plain matter-of-fact affair, written on mercantile note, as business-like in outward appearance as any of the dozen letters that might be laid on his desk that same mail. It was as sure to go safely as though she had presented a bill or questioned him about the character of a servant. It might be that Dr. Prentiss had neglected to attend to the postage; but the clerk was one of her Sunday-school boys, he would not let it be detained. She had met Dr. Prentiss four times since that night: at church, at the Parsonage where she had called on an errand from her mother, at the village Mite Society where he had taken Nettie Mason out to supper, and once in the street; there had been no opportunity to

remind him of the letter, even if she had cared to do so.

Perhaps—but she repelled the charge with hot indignation—perhaps he had asked for the letter—he had a good excuse for asking for it—and after seeing the address, upon some pretence had kept it in his possession. He might have opened it and read it! She was provoked at herself that such an accusation could flash across her mind, but having found entrance it came again and again. Would she believe him if he denied it? Her mother did not believe that he had meant to “tease” her in copying the description of the evening; she believed that he had deliberately intended to deceive her. Was she unjust to him or was the impression of his untruthfulness meant to be her safeguard? She did not know, but you and I know. The four weeks ran into five, six, seven. She would have given up all hope of ever hearing from the stranger, but that she did not know how to *give up*. Mollie wrote four full sheets to prove to her that in giving up Dr. Prentiss, she was throwing away something that some day she might cry for in vain.

“When you are old and have no one to love you, you will think of the love you have so

lightly thrown away," urged Mollie in pitiful strain.

"Then I'll think of it," answered Rebekah, stoutly. "I would rather think of that than that I had done wrong. And you know, Mollie, that I do believe that I'm taken care of."

Once he had said pathetically: "Everything has been against me all my life." And now she was "against" him; she was not wholly on his side. He was weak and needed her, he pleaded; her soul rebelled at this; she loved strength, she could not love weakness in one who should be to her strength, who should be to her what Christ was to the church. Oh, how could she ever expect any one to be to her what Christ was to the church!

Mollie had nothing to say when Rebekah gave her ideal as high as this; this was a height to which she could never hope to climb. "I'm only a broken reed," Dr. Prentiss had once written to her. This might be very touching, but energetic Rebekah had no taste for broken reeds. Mollie delighted in the theory of broken reeds; she was continually seeking to impress Rebekah with the grandeur of saving Dr. Prentiss' soul. At first Rebekah had been startled, and then she had

been angry, zealous for the honor of the Lord. "How dare you say such a thing to me?" she had written in reply. "Do you forget who saves men's souls? If a girl cannot obey the Lord herself, she is a queer one to send on such a mission! Being faithless in the least, I cannot believe I would be asked to be faithful in so much. O, Mollie!"

It was almost February when Dr. Prentiss called one afternoon to see her father. As she passed through the parlor, she heard him remark to her father:

"Mark Ryerson is just the man to attend to it for you; he has been in New York some time, he left San Francisco in the fall. He is keen enough to see through anybody. I'd advise you to put this speculation into his hands."

He glanced at Rebekah, but she was stooping over baby Bertie. This was the reason then! He had been in New York while her letter was on its way to San Francisco! Was she relieved, or did it bring back the old doubt that must be solved in some way?

"What is his address?" her father asked.

She caught up the baby and hurried out. It would be too much of a temptation to know; she

might feel as if she wanted to write again. What a little world she lived in, to find after all this waiting, this stranger so close to her! Dropping her head on Bertie's bosom she uttered a low, inarticulate cry; it held the heart of a prayer. If she might see Miss Southernwood, the touch of her hand, the sound of her voice, would bring a blessing. Some one *must* help her.

"Mother!" she cried, hastening upstairs with Bertie in her arms and bursting into her mother's chamber, "may I go to Rutledge Felix to-morrow?"

Mrs. Maurice was mending stockings with a very contented face; she let her work fall on her lap and looked up at Rebekah. The child had been drooping since Christmas, the monotony of home life might be wearing upon her.

"Rutledge Felix! It would be a pleasant change. But don't let them keep you. To-morrow! I don't know. How can you get off to-morrow?"

"Easily enough. Lulu will be housekeeper. And your cough is almost well."

"I thought they had finished you, Bekie. Have you discovered a lack?"

"Now, mamma, my precious mamma!" she cried kneeling beside her and taking her in both arms, "don't you begin to be sarcastic in your

old age! I want something and I hope I shall find it at Rutledge Felix."

"I hope you may, dear," half sighed her mother; "we all want something I suspect. Your father wants money more than anything, just now; he has been losing a great deal."

"But it doesn't worry you, mother!" said Rebekah, anxiously.

"No: money is not the best thing. But it worries *him*; he says he will mortgage the farm, but that he will try another venture to regain what he has lost."

"Oh, don't let him. Don't let him do that! What would you and the children do without it?"

"And you?" brushing her hair back and looking down into the flushed, pleading face.

"I haven't begun to make use of myself yet! All this time and I am doing nothing with myself."

"Lulu is ready for Rutledge Felix, and the twins play wonderfully for children of their age, and Chip has a start that will help him all his life. You are very thorough, child."

"Yes, that's all I am; not a bit brilliant. But, mother, I want to *use* myself; the children have no pressing need of me; Lulu can take my place

to them—if she do not go to Rutledge Felix. She is ready to teach herself now; I have taught her how to study by herself. I want to lose myself in hard work; I gnaw too much upon my own imaginings.”

The grave eyes were very much in earnest; to Mrs. Maurice a home of her own, husband and child had come so early that she had lost her daughter's experience—whether it were loss or gain she could not decide—but Bekie was unfolding, she was growing with a painful growth and she did not know how to help her; if her child's life were like her own, she would have been her best comforter and counsellor, but the child was travelling through a country that had not been mapped out for her; she became bewildered in trying to follow her, she was satisfied that she should find comfort and counsel in one who had taken the same toiling steps—she would love her and pray for her and be content not to understand her.

“Bekie, dear, I will let you go; perhaps I was selfish to keep you with me for my sake and the children's; but it hasn't been bad for you, has it?” she asked regretfully.

“No; it has been good for me!” returned Re-

bekah, springing to her feet, "but it isn't good, just now."

"You are not mine—only. Find your work and do it," said her mother in her fond, regretful voice.

"And you will not be troubled about anything, you will keep your bright face for me to come home to! And you will save the farm and keep father from 'turning his money over' as he calls it. I want the school-room and the class-rooms again and the sound of recitation and the drumming on the piano and the girls' voices, and I want the *work*. And, mother," turning nervously towards her, "please send me my mail, every single thing that comes. Don't trust Lulu; she might forget. Mr. Rutledge may not need me now, but I think I may find something to do."

Something to do, not something to be. The young heart, hot and restless, was hardly ready to settle down to *be* something. Surely they "serve, who stand and wait" in Christ's kingdom; but, God, I think, does not love us less because we are eager to be on the alert for Him. Rebekah wondered why He had not answered her prayer and sent a reply to her letter;

she did not know that, often, instead of praying to Him about it, she had worried before Him. "And when the people complained it displeased the Lord."

Slow tears dropped upon Mrs. Maurice's pillow that night; was she failing her eldest daughter in a time of need? Would she fail the others, too? Was she more a help to her husband than to her children?

## VII.

### THE END OF SOMETHING.

“Shadow owes its truth to light.”—GAY.

A FEBRUARY morning that was spring; the old stage rolled up on the green grass before the gate and the driver shouted, “All aboard! Forty minutes to meet the train.”

“This shawl strap is so full, Bekie, I expect you will wish you had taken a trunk,” said Mrs. Maurice in the hall.

It was very much like the old times of parting; she could not say another word; she had Lulu now, almost a grown-up daughter, but Lulu had not Bek’s pretty, loving ways.

“There’s no one in the stage,” said Nell, snatching up the shawl strap.

“Good-bye, precious,” whispered Rebekah with both arms about her little mother. “I’ll come home all made over new—and I’ll be *ever* so good.”

"All *aboard*," shouted the stage-driver impatiently, "thirty-eight minutes to catch the train."

There was some one within, she had caught a glimpse of a dark face and a soft black felt hat. She flushed uncomfortably and bowed with more stiffness than dignity. She was not drawn to him this morning, only for love's sake, *his* love's sake; she did not want to miss any good thing, and yet she was not ready to take the good thing—the best thing from him.

"O, Bek," Chip was calling, rushing out to the gate, "I forgot to give you your letter last night and you might have gone away and left it in my Sunday jacket."

"It would have kept," said Dr. Prentiss, reaching out to take it.

She grasped it—almost snatched it. The superscription was in a hand that she did not recognize; the postmark was New York.

After all this time! Her sigh of relief was painful. The fingers that held it trembled visibly.

"Your correspondent writes a long letter," remarked her companion carelessly.

"Yes," she said, crushing it in her hand.

"I will excuse you," he said courteously.

"Thank you; you said it would keep and so

it will," she returned, lightly slipping it into the pocket of her sacque.

If she might believe in him! It would strengthen her more to believe in him than to love him. Her faith in God was more to her at all times than her love to Him.

Dr. Prentiss, after assisting her to her seat, had placed himself at her side. His eyes and voice were unmistakably glad; there was an alertness, a spring about him that thrilled her from head to foot.

"Has somebody died and left you a fortune?" she asked, as the old stage rumbled over the grass.

"As somebody did for you once!" he returned.

"Mine *was* a fortune; I often wonder what I should have been without it."

"I was told you had squandered it all," he said, questioningly.

"So far from it, I'm just awaking to the knowledge that I must put it to practical use," she replied, provokingly. "May yours serve you as well."

"Mine is not in dollars and cents; mine is release from a bond that I had found galling. My release came in the mail with your letter

last night. Bek, I intend to behave myself now. Will that make you happy?"

"I want you always to *have* behaved yourself," she answered severely.

"Can't I redeem myself?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"To redeem one's self is a new doctrine."

"I know that I have no power to forgive my own sins, but, by behaving myself now, can I not blot out the past?"

"In whose eyes?"

"In yours," he said slowly.

She hesitated, the truth would be a hard thing to speak to him.

"Perhaps I am hard and unforgiving, perhaps I am proud, perhaps I am so afraid of sin touching me, perhaps I am not loving and merciful, but I want to believe and trust and look up—and how can I to one who had been wicked before he loved me? And had not repented!"

"That's nonsense. Who *isn't* a sinner?"

"There are some sins we shrink from more than others. Some sins are in the *grain*; I think from such sins I would want one to turn away as well as to confess."

Dr. Prentiss tried to laugh. He was well aware that his fickleness was in the grain.

"What else?" he asked.

"I'm afraid I couldn't forget; there would be a weakness that I should shrink from—a chain is as strong as its weakest part, and in the chain of my—regard for him there would be a want of faith that would make it ready to break."

"You may hate sin and love sinners, may you not?" he asked in a convincing tone.

"Love them to do them good—not love them to believe in them," she answered, earnestly.

"You *are* a metaphysician. Suppose a man becomes a Christian—a new creature, and old things are passed away!"

"Then he is another man, the *old* is passed away," she said quickly, her eyes softening.

"And nothing less would suffice you."

"Nothing less."

"Where have you been all your life?" he asked, impatiently. "You talk like an aged saint."

"With the girls at school and with mother," she answered, literally. "I have not even read about the sin that is in the world."

He was silent; he had no self-defence to make.

Truly this girl had been kept unspotted from the world.

"This morning might be the first that ever was," said Rebekah, after a while, "it is fresh enough to be just made."

"We men ought to thank the religion of Jesus Christ for giving our women to us," said Dr. Prentiss, not heeding her.

"Yes," said Rebekah, with some effort, "and we women expect our husbands to be made by that same religion."

"You haven't confided to me your destination."

"I am going to Rutledge Felix in search of a vocation. I'm going to find some of my good things."

"Then you *are* an heiress."

"Didn't you know it? I am heir of all the ages, and Aunt Rebekah helped me to find my inheritance. That reminds me of a newspaper story I read yesterday. How would I know about the world in far-away Clovernook if I didn't read the newspapers! An old gentleman out west wrote to his relatives east and asked them for money to help himself through the winter; no one responded, except a distant rei-

ative, a lady. She was a school-teacher and she sent him twenty-five dollars out of her own earnings. After several years he died and left her his entire fortune, amounting to something like a hundred thousand dollars."

"She made a good investment. Your Aunt Rebekah was rich, wasn't she?"

"I don't know. I never thought. I have supposed she gave me all she had to give beside the interest of three thousand to our Clovernook church, to go towards the pastor's salary, because of her love to my father. Mother and I were satisfied, although I do think it would be a relief to mother to have some of it now. I want to earn some for her. I don't want her ever to have a careworn face like some of the farmers' wives."

"She will have it your father continues to speculate. Mark Ryerson will help him if any man can. He is one of the men that your religion makes. Bek, haven't you any good word to say to me?"

"Not—yet," she faltered. "You will not even try to be what I want you to be."

"You want me to pray. I never pray. I don't know what to pray about. From this hour I'll

begin to be a straightforward fellow if you will take me."

"No," said Rebekah, not firmly however. She was not as brave as she had believed herself to be: she had been talking of strength and how weak she was herself.

"I get out at the next house; I have business there. Will you write to me?"

"No," she said, relentlessly, "they have a library at Rutledge—I do not need your replies."

He laughed with great amusement, called to the driver to stop, and sprang out. She smiled, perhaps he *had* meant to tease her; she would believe in him as long as she could; that is, if she could believe in a man who did not pray and who did not know what to pray about.

The letter was not opened immediately, she held it in her hand looking at it but not seeing it. Would it make any difference, after all? Was she not understanding God's will without this testimony from a stranger? She had not believed that she could tear it open so quietly. There were two sheets; one contained but a few words:

"The enclosed letter has been returned to me from the Dead Letter Office. I find that I had directed it to Clover Hill instead of Clovernook. I trust that the delay has not caused you anxiety."

The second sheet ran thus:

"MISS REBEKAH WESTERLY.

"*Dear Madam:*—A letter from a friend in San Francisco rec'd yesterday enclosed a note from you. I am glad you wrote it. It is not like many people, but it is like you. I will answer it as I would wish another man to answer such a letter from my sister.

"Julius Prentiss has been known to me for years. I would rather that you would discover his weaknesses for yourself. He has been engaged to his cousin, Jennie Prentiss, for five years; she is sincerely attached to him, and his faults are the faults she can best bear with. The wedding day has been set once, but postponed on account of some caprice of his; it was set again for March tenth, I believe, Janet's birthday. You may show him this letter, or I will speak to him of it myself unless you enjoin si-

lence upon me. Grateful that I can be of any service to you, I am,

“Yours truly,

“MARK RYERSON.”

Again and again she read it, her indignation gathering afresh at every reperusal. He had *dared* to speak to her as he had spoken when he was honorably bound to some one else! This was the “bond” he had broken when she, poor Jennie Prentiss, had trusted him so long. In her anger, in her bitter humiliation, she had not remembered that another was a thousand times more wronged. That afternoon she enclosed the sheets in an envelope addressed to “Julius Prentiss, M. D.” with a single pencilled line of her own:

“May God forgive you.”

## VIII.

### MISS SOUTHERNWOOD.

"That which God writes on thy forehead thou wilt come to."—KORAN.

MISS SOUTHERNWOOD'S little bedroom was the coziest room at Rutledge. How many times it had been a refuge to Rebekah! It was a refuge to-night as she sat with large, troubled eyes watching Miss Southernwood as she wrote the last "Report."

"I'm glad you have come to me, dear," said Miss Southernwood closing her desk. "Mr. Rutledge is hoping to keep you a long while."

"I don't know," sighed Rebekah, "I don't know anything about myself or my life. My life seems very little to me; the days slip by and I don't know what I mean in living them."

"Nor what God means either," replied Miss Southernwood, gravely.

Rebekah was sitting on the foot of the bed leaning against the low foot-board; she traced

the pattern on the carpet with the toe of her slipper before she raised her bewildered eyes.

"Do you not suppose that He means something, something definite by every one of our days?" Miss Southernwood asked.

"Why, yes," confessed Rebekah, "do I think that His meaning is slipping away from me with my days? What can I do to keep hold of His meaning?" she questioned very earnestly.

"Keep a journal!"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed the girl, impatiently. "I've tried that. I wore myself out by looking inside of myself."

"Keeping a journal means keeping your days. There are two ways of doing everything; a right way and a wrong way. I suppose you tried the wrong way. The egotistical way is the wrong way. If only your thoughts and your doings are to be recorded it will be depressing work indeed. God means *you* always, but He means every one else, as well. Once, I remember I thought of a certain occurrence: 'Now this is to teach me a lesson,' and to my humiliation I learned that my part in it was all for some one else."

"I tried to keep a journal while I was here and the first year I was home, but it was dis-

couraging. It kept me thinking about myself; I was my own heroine, the world was all mine and the Bible was written just for me. I gave it up and burnt the book."

"That was the way to grow weak, now try the way to grow strong. One becomes tired of one's own face by constantly studying the reflection of it; it is sad work to be always counting the freckles on one's nose, the lines in one's forehead and the tiny pimples on one's chin."

"And just so I hate to be looking inside of me. I find freckles and wrinkles and pimples all over my poor soul."

"But that is not looking up, or looking around to find God who moves in our human lives. That is self-seeking, not truth seeking. Every day is an object lesson in your life. He teaches us by object lessons as truly as He taught the old Jews. We are all in His infant class. Record every answered prayer, every new mercy, every new thing you learn about Him and if this simple and truthful record of your simple and truthful days do not honor Him it will be because—what?"

"Because I have thought about myself and not thought about Him."

"I am speaking of what I know. I always talk to you girls about what I have lived through. And perhaps that is why I have lived through so much. Try this better plan and see if it will not reveal to you the constant care-taking of God."

"It does seem worth while," said Rebekah, thoughtfully.

"Write your book for your Master as you do everything else for Him. He will use it to educate you. And write this on the first fair page: 'That which I see not teach Thou me.'"

"I will," promised Rebekah. "I will buy the book to-morrow. I don't want to miss any good thing by and by."

"It will help you turn the corners," said Miss Southernwood, "twenty-five and thirty and thirty-five are hard milestones for some of us."

"I'm on the way to the first corner," replied Rebekah seriously. "I hope I shall have found out several things by that time. I would like to show girls how happy and useful an old maid's life may be, and I'm just as eager to show them how beautiful and true and strong the life of a wife and mother may be, and I'm perplexed how to live both lives," she added, with a little confused laugh.

She would not have made this confession to any one beside Miss Southernwood who always understood.

"Live one awhile and then the other," advised Miss Southernwood. "Aren't you glad you must not choose for yourself?"

"Yes," said Rebekah, emphatically; "if I *had* chosen for myself how broken-hearted I should be to-night."

Slipping from the bed she knelt on the carpet beside her friend, and with her head buried in her hands, in a broken voice and with frequent sobs she told her story.

"I am so ashamed, so ashamed!" she repeated vehemently. "I want to hide my face! I did not think God would let such a shameful thing happen to me."

"My child, my child," said Miss Southernwood in her sympathetic voice, "God did let it happen to you, and not only for your own sake, but for the sake of more than one other. You are bearing shame for some one's sake. God has given you the hardest thing to bear; for what is harder to bear than *shame*? Aren't you glad that He chose you to bear so hard a thing? How much shame He suffered for us! I do

not think He could give a young girl a heavier cross than this kind of shame. I am sure Dr. Prentiss has learned something through you; God thought you were willing to be used in this way and He has used you. Poor Jennie Prentiss has greater shame to bear, and hers has come to her through you. For these two people God has made use of you. And it may be that some day some girl will come to you with her story and you will know how to comfort her. God's will is the sweetest comfort. Doesn't it comfort you?"

"Yes; oh, yes," sobbed Rebekah.

"I might say other things, but I give you the surest and best. Oh, the girls that have come to me with their little heart-aches and heart-breaks! Some—most of them—could not receive the comfort I have comforted you with, and they had to bear their shame."

"But I'm afraid I have brought it upon myself. I was pleased because he liked me—it flattered me, I suppose, and I did not stop it. Is it God's will when we make mistakes and bring things upon ourselves?"

"It is often God's will that we shall make mistakes. You have learned to ask wisdom."

"I think I have," acknowledged Rebekah, emphatically.

"And He has taken your mistake into His own hand and is making it a blessing. I trust He is making it a blessing to the others."

"I do hope so. I don't feel bitter and hard now; but how I did hate him! I was sorry that I had to hate him so. It made me ugly. But I can't feel ugly now; I do believe God knew about it all the time and has let me suffer shame."

"He told Peter that he might come to Him on the water, and yet He let him begin to sink. We do go through shame because of obedience very often."

"I wanted to obey; I thought I might help him, he said I could. I wonder how his cousin is bearing it to-night."

Rebekah arose and slipped as naturally back into her restful place on the foot of the bed as though she had not left it. She was not one to make a long ado or a long talk about anything.

"She is a girl of strong character; she thought she was better fitted to marry him than any one else. She will forgive him even this if he be penitent. He can be very penitent and she seems to believe in his penitence. Her determination ex-

ceeds everything; he needs a wife like that. She will be his *will*. He always behaves when he can be with her. Her letters are not strong enough, but her presence seems to be."

"How shameful!" exclaimed Rebekah. "How can she trust him?"

"She does not. Some men need a mother more than a wife, and he is one of them. She is mother and father in one."

"That is not like Christ and the church," said Rebekah. "I love that best."

"She takes the relation of Christ, and he is the church; the church at Laodicea, which was neither cold nor hot."

"Then she will spew him out of her mouth," was the quick rejoinder.

"He may return to his first love—if such weakness and selfishness can love at all."

"Oh, dear," sighed Rebekah, "there are hard things down here in the kingdom."

"Because those in the kingdom and outside of it must mingle until the end. Bek we are not to choose our *friends* outside; we are to mingle with them as Christ did."

"I have learned that," assented Rebekah. "I am so glad that I came to you to be helped out of

my tangle. Now I must live through the shame and be as good as I can and *go on*."

The ten o'clock bell sounded and she sprang to her feet.

"Especially go on," smiled Miss Southernwood. "Are you glad to be under rules again?"

"When I can't be a rule to myself," she laughed. "I wonder how they are doing at home to-night. Now I see my way clear, I feel like going back. My restlessness is all gone."

Truly she was a child in the kingdom; she had but to know God's will to do it. Awakening in the night she touched Miss Southernwood's hand, saying humbly:

"I do hope God will make something out of me, but it seems to me as if He hasn't anything to *begin with*."

"He has Himself to begin with," comforted her friend.

After that, how could she help joyfully falling asleep; after that, how could she help joyfully going home "to begin all over again"? There was no need of her—no special need of her—at Rutledge Felix, and oh, how they did need her at home!

She remained at Rutledge Felix only one week,

but the whole house was in a tumult of exhilaration at her return—perhaps *uproar* would more fully express their boisterous greeting; there seemed to be one continuous cry of “O Bek,” for the next two days.

“You shall not go away again for forty years,” her step-father declared. “Your mother has really moped.”

“Do let me go in twenty,” laughed Rebekah, with suffused eyes.

## IX.

### OTHER THINGS.

“Time is generally the best doctor.”—OVID.

SHE had come home to settle down, this time, she recorded in her new journal, and she did “settle down” and go to work with a sense of rest and a feeling of having been comforted. The promise to them who trust is that they shall not be ashamed; she had been so comforted that even high-spirited and proud as she acknowledged herself to be, she was not ashamed; the flush that touched her eyes and cheeks at every remembrance of her faithless friend was the flush of humility and not of shame. Before she had been at home three days, Chip brought her a letter from Dr. Prentiss—a letter of “explanation,” he termed it. He confessed—if such an acknowledgment may be called confession—that she had drawn his heart away from its rightful allegiance, and that he had deliberately broken his long engagement.

to his cousin for her sweet sake. He did not "confess" that twice before he had broken this "rightful allegiance" for the "sweet sake" of two other girls. He argued his case well, if one can argue well in the cause of faithlessness and falsehood, ending by seeking to lay siege to the stronghold of her heart: her loyalty to Christ. "Your sweet and grave religiousness is one of your attractions to me; what would I not be for your sake?" It may have been cruel, for he had written in one of his intermittent repentant moods—but she had not outgrown the sarcasm of her girlhood, and the temptation in the well-rounded sentences was too great to be resisted, therefore she printed in small capitals upon the head of his first sheet:

"COPIED FROM THE 'COMPLETE LETTER WRITER,'  
UNDER THE CAPTION OF 'FROM A YOUNG MAN WHO HAD  
WEAKLY AND WICKEDLY BROKEN HIS TROTH TO ONE GIRL  
TO ANOTHER WHO HEARTILY DESPISED HIM.'"

Then she enclosed it and returned it to the writer.

It was hard upon him, she declared to her mother, but he deserved it, and she was glad she did it.

With very grave eyes her mother replied: "God does not despise one penitent word, Bekie.

"But he *isn't* penitent," persisted Bekie; "he was trying to work upon my feelings. He would write that same letter to another girl about me, —mother, he doesn't know the difference between a lie and the truth. And God keeps the people who make a lie and love it outside the gates."

"But, Bekie, although he was not a friend worth keeping, was it worth while to make him an enemy?"

"That's worldly wise," said Rebekah, seriously. "Oh I do hate deceit so! Sometimes I'm afraid I hate a lie more than I love the truth."

The first time she saw him afterward he was talking to Gertrude Raymond at Mite Society; he acknowledged her presence with an expression that was intended to quench her. She bowed slightly not feeling at all quenched. It was months before they exchanged a greeting of any kind.

She wrote to Miss Southernwood that she had given herself back to herself, having set herself down in a corner and talked to herself, and now she had a heart at leisure from itself to go on and keep on.

Her journal was one of the things that she kept on; she wrote on the first blank page over

the motto Miss Southernwood had given her: "The Story of my Quiet Life," and faithfully recorded everything in her life or in the lives of the others worth remembering. Every month she read it aloud to her mother. It ran into volumes second, third and fourth before new and pressing duties pushed it out of her days. Many things that she saw not did the Lord teach her.

The list in April of this year of things to be thankful for was on this wise:

"*April* 1. I found something delicious to read aloud at the Mission Band.

"2. The twins did not fret over their music lesson; they play half a dozen duets very nicely.

"3. Something I suggested relieved mother's neuralgia. She looks brighter than she has for a month.

"4. Father listened as if he loved to while I sang to Bertie to-night.

"5. Mrs. Dunraven has promised to talk to me about my years at Rutledge Felix.

"6. Floy said it made her happy to stay an hour in my sanctum.

"7. The sermon on 'Take no Thought' to-day did me *ever* so much good.

"8. Mother said my mouth was a comfort to her.

"9. Mollie wrote that my experience with Dr. P. had taught her something about what girls have to do in the world. She said young men would be stronger if girls loved strength and manliness better. Good for Mollie!

"10. The girls like my idea of forming a Debating Society. We shall write essays and read them.

"11. I am thankful that I could promise *cheerfully* when mother asked me if I would consider the care of the twins' wardrobe my special work. If I do it, I shall *do* it.

"12. Chip said when he talks to the boys he tries not to say anything that would make me sorry.

"13. I do not think about my bad complexion any more.

"14. I played in church to-day and did not feel nervous. I am thankful they wish me to be organist, for now I can be a real *help* in church service.

"15. One of my Sunday-school boys is to join the church at next communion.

"16. Mother has a new carpet in her room. Hers was so shabby, and she will not spend a cent upon herself.

"17. Lulu said there must be sunshine in my heart, else my face couldn't keep so bright.

"18. Mr. Dunraven told Dr. Mason that I am one of the helpers in the church that he counts on.

"19. Father gave me two dollars for postage, etc., *without asking*.

"20. I am learning to admire Lulu's pretty face without wishing that I looked like her.

"21. The wrapper I have cut and made for mother fits *splendidly*.

"22. I am learning to find something every day in the Bible to strengthen and cheer me—to make it worth while to *keep on*.

"23. Miss Southernwood's letter.

"24. Mr. Ryerson is at the Parsonage and has not tried to find me out.

"25. Dr. Prentiss said to Mrs. Dunraven that I was a 'girl of principle.' She told mother.

"26. I have found some old books: 'Burke on the Sublime and Beautiful' and 'Essays of Macauley,' etc.

"27. I am thankful that Lulu asked me to pray aloud every night so she can hear me. It was taking up my cross.

"28. I am learning not to be sarcastic.

“29. In the Debating Club my essay written to prove that *manner* is more taking than *dress* was voted to be best.

“30. I am thankful for the habit of recording daily mercies.”

## X.

### THE LONGEST DAY.

“The mother’s heart is the child’s school-room.”—BEECHER.

REBEKAH stood at the kitchen table hulling strawberries for tea; it was in one of those June twilights that her soul delighted in. Afterward she remembered that it was the longest day in the year.

Bertie was in his high chair at the table crowing jubilantly with stained cheeks and sweet scented, dimpled fingers. The children called him “Bek’s Baby” oftener than anything else. “What is your name?” some one had asked him before he was fifteen months old, and he had answered so promptly and gravely, “Bek’s Baby,” that the name had become a household word.

“O, Bek,” shouted Nell, the news-teller, rushing in with an over-brimming pail of white cherries, “who *do* you think is married? You’ll never, never guess!”

“I guess it’s you,” hazarded Bek gravely.

"Now be sensible and guess," pouted Nell.  
"It's two people of our church."

"Two ladies or two gentlemen?" queried Bek provokingly.

"A lady *and* a gentleman. She is in the choir, but he doesn't come to church very often."

"Nettie Mason?"

"No."

"Lou Harris?"

"No."

"Mira Green?"

"No," laughed Nell.

"It isn't Mame Dunraven?"

"No," with dancing eyes.

"Lucy Conover?"

"No; no, indeed!" energetically.

"Who else is in the choir? Emily True?"

"No; guess again. You'll never guess. She's been such a stay-at-home, nobody will think of her. Do guess! There are six more girls in the choir."

"But they are too young! It isn't Gertrude Raymond?"

"Oh, no," mimicked Nell, "it isn't Gertrude Raymond! But it *is*! Miss Gertrude herself! Now guess the gentleman."

"I did not know that any gentleman in the village waited upon her."

"He isn't in the village, but he drives through it every day!"

"Oh!"

Bek's color paled. But how absurd it was to think of him!

"It's Dr. Prentiss!" announced Nell, triumphantly. "You would never have guessed. They were married early this morning, and have started on their wedding tour to—to—Thousand Isles—if there are so many anywhere! It sounded like that."

"Who told you?" asked Bek quietly, pressing a big strawberry into Bertie's mouth.

"Dr. Mason is telling father at the gate, and he said he was sorry for her," added Nell, mysteriously. "I'm sure I don't why. Do you?"

"I hope she will never know why," returned Rebekah. "Bertram! Bertram! Look at those hands," she cried bending over him.

But this was not the reason that to-day seemed the longest day in the year. Her mother had not felt strong to-day, nor for many days, and she had banished her to the nondescript apartment known as the Nursery. She was sprinkling powdered

sugar over a glass dish of strawberries to take up to her when Floy came into the kitchen.

“Mamma wants to see you by and by, Bek,” she said. “She is in no hurry, she says eat your supper first. Oh, what delicious strawberries!”

“Ring the bell and call Lulu to take my place, and I’ll take mamma’s supper up. Don’t let father wait for me; I don’t want anything to-night.”

But she did want something to-night. She did not know what she wanted.

Gertrude Raymond—conscientious, truth-loving Gertrude Raymond, with her decided opinions, her strong determination, her cool, stately manner, her high aims, her outspoken disdain for every one who was not perfect in her eyes—to do this thing of all things! What error in the form of truth had blinded her judgment! What dark angel in the guise of self-denying sanctity had hovered over her and lured her on to follow! She must have sacrificed herself to an idea! She had always been looking forward to doing some grand thing for truth’s sake!

Poor Gertrude! Where was her mother, and why did *she* herself not write to Mr. Ryerson? The groan of thankfulness that swelled into her heart burst from her lips in an agony of grati-

tude. How *she* had been taken care of! She went slowly up the broad staircase with her tray of biscuits, strawberries and fragrant steaming tea. The Nursery door stood ajar; she gave it a slight push without disturbing her mother. There was such a hush about the room that she decided that her mother must have fallen asleep.

Was it years and years since she had stood last upon the threshold? Since she had run laughing down stairs at some comical story her mother had told her that very afternoon! Gertrude's burden seemed to have fallen upon her; but Gertrude did not know that it was a burden. Could her flutter of hope be utterly without anxiety? Had Mr. Dunraven married her without making it plain that his nephew sometimes—drank? How she had shivered when her mother had told her only yesterday that this was true! And if she had shivered would not Gertrude's heart break? At the last choir meeting Gertrude had whispered to her with a little laugh that she had just turned the first corner—she was twenty-five.

And she had turned it *so*!

The room was still hushed, the tray was unsteady in her hands, the dainty china cup had ceased to steam.

The picture of that room as she stood upon the threshold seemed burned into her brain; years afterward she saw it as it was to-night in the twilight. The new rug of her mother's braiding before the open fireplace, the jug with broken rim standing in the red fireplace holding ferns and daisies, yellow and white daisies, the straw matting with its checks of red and yellow, with the worn place before the high, old-fashioned chest of drawers, the gray wall paper with its pink fuchsias and bright green leaves, the chintz covered lounge, the chromos and photographs that she and the children had hung upon the walls, the white muslin curtains crumpled and soiled, the breath of the June evening through the slats of the closed gray blinds, the square black clock on the mantle and the Silent Comforter at the head of the narrow white bed with the words: "IS ANYTHING TOO HARD FOR THE LORD?" standing out clear upon it. But where was her mother?

The lounge and white bed and little rocker were tenantless; she gave the door another push, there was a stir somewhere behind it; her mother was rising from her knees with a glorified face. Yes, it was glorified; no other word would express its radiance.

"My daughter."

"Mother," said Bek, advancing slowly, feeling almost shy.

"I want to talk to you a little while," began Mrs. Maurice.

"Sit down in the rocker and taste this perfect supper first," coaxed Rebekah.

"It *is* tempting," said her mother, seating herself in the rocker with her every-day air; her face was radiant still but some of the glory had left it.

Rebekah placed the tray in her lap and knelt beside her on the matting watching her as she sipped the tea.

"Mother, I serve you on my knees," she said playfully, bending her light head to touch her mother's hand with her lips.

"Bek, daughter," said Mrs. Maurice pausing in her absent-minded work of eating the strawberries, "do you love me well enough to love me unselfishly?"

"No, ma'am," responded Bek promptly.

"There has been a great deal of love in my life; I was an only child, my father and mother did not die until I had your own father to love me and then I had *you*. And then father began to love me and has loved me with all his

dear, big, loving heart and I've had beside my blessed children. They all love me too much."

"Of course we do, Precious; do taste another strawberry; I picked out the biggest for you."

"I've always had the biggest of everything, I think. And now I have another joy; the joy of soon going Home where so much more love is."

Bek looked uncomprehending, and lifted a strawberry to her mother's lips.

"I have the joy of leaving all my loved ones with you; they are my legacy to you—Lulu and Chip and Nell and Floy and Bek's Baby."

"Why, *mother!* Where are you going?" cried bewildered Bek.

"I'm going away for a little while—to rest and to work. The Lord thinks I've had time enough down here among you all; He has called me and I've said, 'Yes, Lord, as soon as Thou art ready for me.'"

"*Mother!*" cried Bek, with white lips and staring, wild eyes, "you don't mean that you are going to *die!*"

"We call it that sometimes; but I have eternal life, I cannot die; I am going to sleep some day pretty soon, and I shall wake up and see the Lord's face."

Bek's head dropped on her mother's shoulder; her lips and tongue seemed paralyzed. Setting the tray that Bek had so carefully prepared upon the matting at her side, the mother gathered the child in her arms, resting the shining head upon her bosom.

"I have known it so long; I have been preparing for it, but I could not break it gradually to you; I have said many things but you *would* not understand. I was brave in the spring, I was willing to let you go, but how I prayed that you might not stay! I may live all the summer, but I do not hope to be with you all through the winter. I want to say a few things to you now while I am strong enough, and I want you to prepare the children, and to help father, poor father! bear it. You have never failed me, Bekie, and you will not fail me now. Will you, dear?"

But Rebekah could only sob.

"I have very little to say; I have been saying it all along and living it all along I hope. I am not very old—only eighteen years older than you, and you are twenty-three—but my life seems long, it has been so full.—And about Lulu. She is so bright and winning and beautiful

that I would be afraid for her had I not given her to God. Watch over her like a mother and elder sister all in one. Keep her from the attentions of light and trifling young men—your experience has made you a fitting counsellor for her; do not let her marry one who is not a Christian, a thorough Christian; tell her when the time comes of what I am saying to-night. There is nothing new to say about the others; I think they will all soon love you as well as they love me. I have no money to leave any of you; I only love you, that is all. I have been so happy all my life—my Christian life has been so full of joy ever since that clouded time. It is full of joy now.”

Rebekah could not lift her head or speak; her sobs had ceased, but she trembled still.

“I want everything to be joyful to the end; we will all be as happy as we can. Everything will go on just the same. While you were away those two days at the Parsonage last month I had an examination and consultation and two physicians declare that an operation to remove my trouble would be more than they dare undertake. I shall live longer as I am. Your father is keeping us for my sake, but it

almost killed him. Do you see how white his hair has grown? Bekie, kiss mother, and cover her up on the lounge."

Rebekah rose mechanically, led her mother to the lounge and covered her with the gay lounge afghan.

"Now go down and see if father has everything he wants," she said faintly.

Obediently she went downstairs and poured the tea; she talked to the children at the table and promised to play for them in the evening; she entertained Mame Dunraven and Lou Harris for an hour, sang her baby to sleep, and then went upstairs to bid her mother good-night.

Mr. Maurice was sitting close to the lounge, holding his wife's hand. Bek stepped in and kissed her mother silently, and then went to bed in the dark. The dawn was in the sky before she closed her eyes to sleep. And then came all the duties of the day, with the burden of a day that she had never looked forward to. It did not seem as if there were much of Heaven in the kingdom on the earth to-day. How she longed to go with her mother!

She was so weak and ignorant, how could Christ need her on the earth for anything?

## XI.

### FAITH AND LITTLE FAITH.

“The steps of faith fall on the seeming void and find the rock beneath.”—WHITTIER.

MISS SOUTHERNWOOD'S letter brought the first ray of light. If Bek needed her, if she could be of any service, she would gladly come to her and remain through vacation. She flew up to the nursery with the open letter and spread it before her mother.

“O, mother,” was all she could cry, with a great, choking sob.

About that time another help came. It came through a sermon preached by Mr. Prentiss in their little Clovernook church. He had his sermon also: a face in the choir that had changed and flushed at his words, a head that was bent eagerly forward, eyes that shyly thanked him as he met them for an instant on his way out of church.

“O, Bek,” cried Lulu, impulsively, the first in-

stant they were alone. "I did want to speak to him and thank him, didn't you?"

"No," said Bek, thoughtfully. "I did not think of him; I thought only of what he had said."

Impulsive Lulu was silenced. It was only a month since she had taken her first communion. At the meeting of the session when she had been examined for admission to the Church, Mr. Dunraven had asked her,

"Has any one urged you to come?"

"Yes," she answered, her eyes slowly filling, "Jesus."

"Bek, I didn't mean—that I thought more of him than of what he said," she said humbly; "but it did stir me up so. I've been praying so *hard* for mother to get well! And for—other things."

"So have I," acknowledged Bek. "I'm afraid we haven't faith enough to ask God to do His will."

The words that stirred them so were these:

"Some call speaking to God continually about everything that worries us persevering in prayer. It certainly is persevering in something; but the question is, Is it prayer? It is written, 'And when the people *complained*, it displeased the Lord.' Did you ever think that much of our praying is

born of faithlessness and persevered in because of faithlessness? We are apt to think that it is faith only that stirs us up to ask of God. Was it faith that brought the trembling little company in the ship to the Saviour with the rebuking cry, 'Carest Thou not that we perish?' It is true that the Lord heard them and heeded them; He awoke from His sleep to quiet the storm, but He turned to His disciples with the rebuke: 'O, ye of little faith,' and 'Where is your faith?' As though they had shown no faith at all. His faith was perfect faith, and He had slept instead of crying out to His father. . . . . May not our urgings—our untimely urgings for a certain, much desired, seeming good, degenerate through needless repetition into wearisome, worrying complaints? Who among us would rush into the presence of a king and prefer our request before we had done him some sort of homage? And yet I know people who cry, 'Lord, give me this thing!' before they thank Him for His goodness, and before they confess their sins. . . . . 'Our Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask Him,' One has said Who knows His Father's heart towards us, therefore our many persuasive pleadings are not necessary to give Him this knowledge

of ourselves; our object cannot be to move His heart towards us, because He planned all good things for us long before we uttered our first cry; it cannot be that we intend to prepare Him to shower upon us His prepared good, for is He not waiting with His full, full hands stretched out towards us?

“Oh, our hindering prayers! may God forgive them! Not three hours ago I heard a patient mother say to her child, ‘*Ask* me, but don’t tease.’ ‘*Ask*, and ye shall receive,’ not tease, worry, fret, complain, and ye shall receive. Ask with a heart full of faith, full of hope because full of faith, and with the sunshiniest face in the world. Anoint your head with the oil of gladness before you kneel before Him. Good things *are* promised and we have a right to promised things; we have the right of those who *ask according to His will*. Ah, this asking according to His will! How little we know about it! Yet, last week, when God heard us and answered us, we thought we knew all about it. Why did He answer if we did not ask in faith? Why did He answer those disciples who had so little faith? Perhaps He did say to us ‘O, ye of little faith’ and we were so absorbed in the answer to our prayer that we did not listen to His voice.

Oh, how still the soul must be—how untroubled the soul must be to hear God's low voice! Not when we are taken up with ourselves can we hear Him speak. We think we ask with importunate faith; instead, we may be teasing with importunate unbelief. I say this because I know it in myself, and to you all because you know it in yourselves. Paul speaks of making request with joy. And again '*with thanksgiving* make known your requests unto God.' Thank Him, I beseech you, for the last good thing before you plead for another! And praise Him for being good Himself as well as for giving good things to you.

. . . . .  
“Again, it is only *good* that is promised, and I am assured that grown-up Christians often coax for things not good for them, as ignorantly as little children do. But faith in God and submission to His will, readiness to await His time and willingness for the desired good to be withheld altogether, have power in themselves to change all things into good; so that pleading any ‘desire’ does not perplex Him who made the promise to give. We, often times, have need to be changed very much ourselves if we would not have the blessing we are asking for changed in itself.

Often times we persuade ourselves—am I the only one who must confess it?—that we are spreading the matter out before the Lord when we are only delighting our care-taking souls by planning our plans in His presence, and, because of doing that, are assuring ourselves that they must succeed. We call this moaning, anxious, planning reverie the prayer of faith. God may have a name for it that would startle us exceedingly. Often and often we kneel before Him breaking His plain command, 'Take no thought.' Often and often we go to Him to bewail to-morrow. Oh, our selfish, hindering prayers! All for ourselves! When do we pray for others? Last Sunday I heard a city pastor say, 'We pray best for ourselves when we pray most for others! Let me repeat it with emphasis. And have faith for others as well as for yourselves.' Do not complain about them nor for them before God. Faith and Unbelief are both standing praying; both are importunate. Faith asks: 'Show Thy will to me.' Unbelief prays: 'Grant that in this thing my will may be done.' Faith pleads: 'Plan for me.' Unbelief urges: 'Prosper my plans.' Faith submits: 'Withhold if it please Thee.' Unbelief groans, frets, complains, insists: 'Give, give, give.' Faith

exults: 'For Christ's sake.' Unbelief uses the Name above all names as a passport to favor. Faith leaves it all in God's hands. Unbelief ponders it, plans it, reiterates it mightily before the Lord. Faith sees the heart of God. Unbelief can see only its heart's desire. Faith with her clear eyes can see God's way. Unbelief stumbles along in the dark. And yet would you believe it? they often use the same words. Often Faith is silent while Unbelief is given to 'much speaking.'

"Said your pastor to me last night, 'Often I look up to God. I do not plead at all.' Unbelief sometimes 'receives' its heart's desires; the children of Israel did and were made lean in their souls. Faith always gives unquestioning, submissive, joyful faith to God. Paul did—and he went to Rome after his long praying and long waiting. Can you find a promise anywhere that God will comfort unbelief? That He will anywhere help you to cross the bridge before you come to it? Faith to ask is only a part of faith;—faith to wait as long as God waits is persevering faith; faith to take what God gives, when God gives, how God gives, is submissive faith. Faith is much, but it is not everything. It is not God, it is only one of His means. Do

not make too much of faith; do not worship it. Christ nowhere commands, 'Have faith in your own faith,' but He does command; 'Have faith in God.'

"Let us then have faith—it is the gift of God, we may have it for the asking—let us have faith in God who never breaks His word, in God who never makes haste because His children have no faith to wait. I think He does make haste when we have faith not to make haste ourselves; an angel, you remember, was once caused to fly swiftly."

In the nursery with their mother on the lounge and Miss Southernwood in the rocker beside her the girls gave as much of the sermon as they could frame into words.

"I've been through it all," said their mother.

"He has, too," added Miss Southernwood.

"Now I may thank him," cried Lulu, "because he isn't a stranger at all."

"Only a bachelor dominie so absorbed in his work and his sister that he never has married and never will. He is a great deal to me, and I look up to him as though the fifteen years' seniority were on his black head instead of my white one."

"And now, mamma, he'll come and see you," said Lulu, "and make you almost well with his faith and his voice."

At that same moment the strange minister and his cousin Mame Dunraven were sitting on the Parsonage piazza.

"'A smile of God thou art,'" he quoted, "that has been in my mind ever since I came out of church. Who is that young girl with remarkable gray eyes? She is made of the stuff that womanhood is made of? She is 'standing with reluctant feet,' just now, but what a woman she will make!"

"We all have remarkable eyes," answered Miss Dunraven, seriously, "and I'm sure we all kept our eyes on you. Who told you how girls pray?"

"I pray myself! And women pray as girls do and men as women do. I would like to hear that girl talk. She is in trouble about something. She was in white."

"As if we were not all in white. Didn't you see the rest of us?"

"Yes. I saw you all and thank you for your patient attention."

"It may have been Bek Westerly. She's in trouble about her mother."

"I will call to-morrow. I want to see her mother. I suspect that I have a message for her that I have delayed six years in giving. I never thought of it until I started to come east. Have you heard Miss Rebekah speak of her old aunt who sent her to school?"

"Yes, indeed. How she blesses the old lady! She teaches the girls at home herself,—and none of them will go away to school. Lulu has Bek's books and Bek says she is doing better than any girl she knew there. You ought to see her little poems, and Bek's playing is nothing to hers. Bek is correct and thorough, but Lulu has talent. And she's so much prettier than Bek. If Bek were not as sweet and good as she can be, she'd be envious and jealous. Bek is so much older too; it seems as if precedence in these things should be her birthright. It is not that dear little Bek is not sensitive or quick to see—it is because she is so thoroughly sweet-hearted. Lulu has twice the attention from every one that she has already, and Lulu isn't eighteen yet. And Lulu is as unconscious of it as Bek is conscious; she says she is the raspberry and Bek is the strawberry. Her younger sister's talent and beauty and social success is Bek's discipline, for Lulu *is* and *has* what

Bek most cares for! And Lulu is as sweet and spiritual as Bek with it all. I never saw girls to whom life meant so much and yet to whom the other life meant so much. Lulu's admiration of Bek is lovely to see. Bek told me about your lecture-room talk the first time she saw you—and the only time until this morning—it has helped her wonderfully with the children she says. She has forced herself to *talk* to them and how they do talk to her."

"I wonder if I saw Lulu this morning. I saw Bek, of course. I wish I had a hundred listeners like her. I wish people could *see* her listen; they might become infected. I saw an oval face, gray eyes with black brows, cheeks tinted, but not rosy, and purplish black hair falling over her forehead."

"Lulu, of course. Who else is like my Lulu? You see I have an enthusiasm for her."

"It was not Lulu's beauty that attracted me—I should not call her beautiful—it was the soul in her eye; if I had recognized that soul in the eyes of that deaf old man in front of me, I should have planned to call upon him to-morrow. I want to see what that soul can say."

"She will have enough to say. I wish you

might see some of her little rhymes; she won't let me call them poems. They are not remarkable of course—nobody can be remarkable nowadays—but they are thoughtful and sweet.”

“Does Bek fall into rhyme?” he asked teasingly.

“I never heard of it. Bek copies Lulu's into her own journal. Lulu is in my Sunday-school class, so I know all her heart. I don't want her to be spoiled, and she will be if people find her out. She is one of those people that you can't help touching and caressing and saying pretty things to. She refuses to go away to school, and I am very glad. Boarding-school didn't spoil Bek, but it might give Lulu a few airs. I want her to stay under Bek's wing until she finds safety in the home of her husband. Mr. Maurice has lost everything but his farm, people say, and Lulu may have to be the one to go out and earn money. They can never spare Bek.”

“What could Lulu do?” he inquired interestedly.

“Teach, I suppose. I hope she won't rush into print. She began to write a book when she was twelve years old, she brought it here one evening to read to me. She read it to me as easily as

I am talking to you. It isn't finished, but she wrote several hundred pages."

"Was there promise in it?"

"The very thinking to do it with nothing outside of herself was a promise in itself. It was all imitation, of course, nothing original, but the imitation was perfect. Everybody has forgotten it now, and perhaps she has herself. I hope she'll settle down into a pudding-making, stocking-darning, child-loving mother! There are people enough to write, too many of them, but there are not half enough girls to be good mothers."

"Is their mother a good mother?" he asked, thinking of Bek's childhood.

"Yes, she is a lovely mother, but she is a better wife. And I think she feels it."

"And the girls will be better mothers than wives?" he suggested.

"Do you know, so often I hear mothers admit that they love their children better than they love their husbands that it is a rest once in a while to find a wife among the mothers. It may be the same among the fathers, but the fathers don't talk to me."

"The mothers are hardly wise to do it," he returned.

"Not wise, but some women are talkers."

"As I have evidence at this present moment," he laughed.

"I think it must be because—" she said thoughtfully.

"Because?" he encouraged.

"Because there are so few husbands who make their wives feel how blessed the relation is between Christ and the church! I couldn't say that to any one but you; but you always understand how I come to say such things. So many women are reverent and adoring in their very natures that they could not but love best such husbands—if it were not for the overpowering mother-love, perhaps. Well it's a puzzle," she said, laughing a little. "I confess I've waded into waters too deep for me. Mark Ryerson is one of those men."

"He *is* a man!" exclaimed Mr. Prentiss, enthusiastically. "He sits on a high stool all day at a desk and in the evening teaches music for the love of it."

"He needs money badly enough," interposed Miss Dunraven.

"Too badly for his own peace of mind," was the quick rejoinder.

"He is glorious! Just think of his taking care of those three orphan girls instead of letting

some association assist him; patriots ought to care for those children, their father lost his life fighting for them, and their mother died because she couldn't live without him. The physicians said she died because she grieved so brokenheartedly. She never went out into the sunshine after that telegram. He has his mother beside, for she *will* stay with the children, and that selfish sister will not take any of them. He's all the grander in contrast with her. And he's such a real father to them, young man as he is. He's younger than Julius by two or three years. Julius isn't the only one he tries to keep straight. He's the most unselfish human being I ever saw. And to think Janet refused him for the sake of Julius! I have no words to express my indignation. And he bears that and is as full of life as ever! Oh dear," with a comical sigh, "how much love some worthless people contrive to wheedle out of other people! He was at church and saw Bek and Lulu. He said Bek's face rested him. I think she rests everybody. She takes God at His word; that's all the difference between her and other people."

"Mark could not marry with those burdens upon him," said Mr. Prentiss.

"Not yet, not for ever so long. But Janet did not think of that. He is too much like her; she wanted to sacrifice herself, I suppose. I'm glad people are stopped. Such things are of about as much use as burning yourself on your husband's body. I *know* Julius Prentiss. How can any woman do for him what the love of God hasn't done? I hope it isn't wicked, but it *exasperates* me to think of women like Janet and Bek Westerly and Gertrude Raymond pining to sacrifice themselves."

"They are fascinated, I suppose, as a bird is fascinated by a snake; the bird doesn't want to sacrifice itself, only, somehow, it can't help it. I never saw a woman that was willing to sacrifice herself to an ugly, disagreeable fellow; they are always charming, in some way, and it is the charm they yield to, and not the high pressure of their own spirituality and spirit of self-sacrifice. Let this same man make himself loathsome and the woman keeps to him because it is *right*, not because she loves him. Gertrude Prentiss will confess that to herself some day."

"Beware! You are robbing woman of her saintship."

"The grace of God makes saints, nothing else,

he replied. "Only God can bear with the unrepentant human heart; when hearts are like to break, sometimes, they open themselves to me. The world sees the wife's devotion; they do not see the spring of it. Believe me, it is love to God and not love to man that crowns the woman a saint."

"Well, I know there *are* saints on the earth in unheard of places, doing everyday matters. If you want to live on earth with a bit of Heaven to brighten it, go and stay awhile with Bek's mother and Miss Southernwood."

That same Sunday after Sunday-school Bek went across the street from the church to read awhile to a blind old lady who had loved her father when he was the young pastor in Clovernook. She had a book of Miss Southernwood's this afternoon: "Heaven Anticipated."

"I'm determined to have what I want at any cost," declared a voice sullenly. "I believe I will have it, too." Bek overheard the remark as she stood in the small entry. The sullen voice belonged to the blind old lady's daughter-in-law.

"Oh, don't say that!" cried a voice.

The voice was hardly like Gertrude Raymond's,

it was so high and shrill. Bek slipped in as though she belonged in the cool, shaded parlor and dropped down on a faded hassock at the old lady's feet.

Mrs. Payson, the daughter-in-law, and Bertie's old nurse, sat by the window with a religious paper spread out upon her lap; Gertrude had risen to go, but blind Aunt Comfort's next words stayed her feet; she dropped back into her chair to listen.

"Surely: people usually do have what they seek above all things. It is startling to me as I look back over my long life and remember the experiences of my friends, to note this fact; they have all had their heart's desire!"

"Why, I didn't know people *could*," said Bek.

"You here, dearie! I hope you will have yours. I more and more assuredly believe, even in this world that we call such a world of disappointment, we do have the things we set our hearts upon. So, my dear, my dears, all of you. I shall be surprised if you are exceptions."

"Can you say that you have found what you wanted most?" asked Gertrude, excitedly.

"Yes," was the quiet reply, "the thing that I have sought that I have found, according to the sure word of promise."

"It is very encouraging," said Bek. "I'll have to tell Mollie that."

"So it is! It is very interesting to me to study what people are setting their hearts upon, to trace the workings of their hearts and to trace God's workings."

"Our misleading hearts," said Gertrude in a low voice.

"We can all have our plan or His, just as we choose," Aunt Comfort added.

An involuntary exclamation escaped Bek.

"The only things that we need fight against are His merciful hindrances."

"Persevering people always find obstacles," resented Mrs. Payson in an argumentative tone.

Aunt Comfort went on in her low monotone, as if she were speaking to herself. A footstep on the grass under the windows did not disturb her and when broad black shoulders and a straw hat appeared at the window there were no exclamations because Mr. Prentiss held up a warning finger. To hear Aunt Comfort talk was one of his reasons for choosing to spend his vacation in Clovernook.

"I once knew a lady, handsome and bright," she was saying, "who seemed to care for nothing

but dress; she seemed to care more to be elegantly dressed than she did for anything else in Heaven or on earth. And when she was dressed she *was* a picture! Her little daughter, fresh from that great school at Bethlehem, begged permission to go to church one Sabbath afternoon, saying that she always went to church at school. 'No, indeed,' said her mother, sharply, 'you would be a pretty sight when you came out. How all those flounces would look after you had sat on them and mussed them an hour or two. Take a walk if you must go out somewhere.' This mother died not long afterward; she was unconscious for days, never dropping one word that her friends care to remember. Then her husband spent his evenings at home, for the first time for years and years, and the little girl looked forward to wearing her mother's diamonds. But she, the mother, had had her heart's desire. She was elegance itself even in her coffin."

Mr. Prentiss looked at Bek and nodded; he approved of Aunt Comfort's little sermons.

Mrs. Payson fidgeted in her chair; Gertrude listened with her eyes on the carpet. Was not she having her own heart's desire and nobody knew that her heart was burning up.

“And I knew a Mrs. Bacon once,” the old lady remembered; “*she* was a housekeeper! That’s all she seemed to live for. I suppose she did live for other things, but this came first. What a kitchen she had—so shiny and sweet! The kinds of cake that she could make; and the pounds of yellow butter that she sent to market, and the cans of fruit in her store-closet! Why it would take some knowledge of arithmetic to count them. She never left home on a working day—how could she? A match might be wasted, or the wrong kind of cake cut.

“She had a young brother, a young fellow of warm heart but weak intellect, who lived with a married brother a mile out of the village; he fell sick and lingered all through one summer; he sat day after day alone and slept night after night alone, with no one near to ask if he wanted a drink of water. But she kept her boarders, and canned her fruit, put down her winter’s butter and kept her kitchen shiny and sweet. I believe she did call to see him two or three times and stay a few minutes when she passed the house on her way to market. But he did not ask for her after awhile. I suppose he knew about the butter pots and the kitchen floor. But two

nights before he died, she did leave all and go to sit up with him. One of the days was Sunday and she could leave then, as she had no churning and baking to do. I was there when she came in. 'So you've come, at last,' was all he said. But I never saw such a kitchen, and one year she canned a hundred and fifty cans of blackberries."

"Oh, Auntie," interposed Gertrude, "I'm sure you don't know any more such dreadful things. You'll make us afraid!"

"That's what I want to do. You remember Harry Weeks, I know. A more ambitious student never went to college. How proud his father was of him! He coughed and studied, and studied and coughed, but he was determined to graduate first in his class of forty-four. And he did—there's no doubt about that! Three days afterward his old father took his dead body home. There was no failure—Harry had reached his standard. Never tell me that some people don't get the thing they want most; if it's in the world they get it."

"But, auntie, everybody don't want such things most," said Bek; "some of us want the best things."

"How many? I don't know *very* many that

want the best things most. We know we do, when God passes us by in the lesser things and gives us the very best things. Now I'll tell you about Bert Heyward how he broke his heart day by day about Louise Vernon, and how he wouldn't take a refusal. The night before they were married, her father told him he would regret it all his days. And isn't his life a wreck? He would have said that God was cruel, if he could not have married her, perhaps, and have taken to drink—and what now is his success! What a home he has, and what a wife! Yes, my dears, all we have to do is to try hard enough, fight against God's will long enough, and we shall have the thing we like best. Fight against his merciful hindrances as girls do when mother and father are not pleased with the young man of their choice—as young men do when the girl says no—fight, fight, fight and get it! And oh, the leanness that comes into—that is sent into—the soul. God gave the Israelites their request and then sent the leanness."

Bek lifted her eyes and then turned away from the despair in Gertrude's face. So soon, Bek thought. Mr. Prentiss was rubbing his finger over the rotten window-sill and was not looking at anybody.

“‘Delight thyself in the Lord,’” quoted Aunt Comfort, “you all know the rest, ‘and He shall give thee the desires of thy heart.’ Isn’t that a thousand times better than fighting along and having your desire as God gave a king to Israel in His anger—”

“But, mother,” interrupted Mrs. Payson, “think how many things you have prayed for, and yet you have gone without.”

“But I haven’t wanted them most of all.”

What have you wanted most of all? Long widowhood, loss of children and a feeble old age?”

The old lady answered sweetly,

“I have wanted most of all and prayed most of all that God’s will might be done in me and I thank Him to-day for giving me my heart’s strongest desire.”

“I can’t attain to that,” said Gertrude, “and now I must go. I didn’t come here to be so rebuked, Auntie.”

“I’m glad if you are,” said Aunt Comfort. “Who is that outside the window? Somebody else listening to my old stories. Is it somebody who can pray, ‘Give me not my heart’s desire until I delight in Thee?’”

“Yes, auntie, I hope it is,” said Mr. Prentiss, “and now I am coming in to see you.”

Bek laid the little book on Aunt Comfort’s lap and slipped out as easily as she had slipped in. She never knew what Mrs. Payson was “determined to have at any cost”; she knew what Gertrude had and at what cost; she knew the “merciful hindrances” that she had not fought against, and she went out into the August sunshine with a glad step and a heart that sang all the way home.

Gertrude went home to shut herself up and moan with tearless eyes with the open Bible in her lap; Bek went home to sit by her mother’s lounge and read a long chapter to her in a book they both learned to love in these days—Baxter’s “Saints’ Rest.” The yellow leaved, green covered, little book! What a comfort it was! what a rest it was!

Mr. Prentiss had promised to call to-morrow, and they all remembered it.

## XII.

### WORKERS AND SHIRKERS.

“Our best doing is our best enjoyment.”—JACOBI.

TO-MORROW was a busy day. When Bek was not under her mother's inspection her eyes began to wear a careworn look; she was beginning to be a real mother in the household. Even Bertie had learned not to “trouble mamma,” but to run to Bek in every little perplexity. Bek had a naughty way of holding up the heavy end, Miss Southernwood said, and scolded her for it, but Bek smiled a little sadly and insisted that she did not know how to do any better.

“You want to make the girls useless and helpless,” Miss Southernwood said severely, “you are keeping them from being self-reliant.” And then Bek looked grave and thought she must learn how to do better. There was kitchen work to do this morning, because Pauline was washing; Bek would not have school broken in upon, and

had sent Lulu to the piano and the twins to the school-room before dinner was in preparation. It was nearly eleven before the burn on Bertie's finger was attended to and the Lima beans shelled, and then she ran up to the school-room to give the twins the history and geography hour and sent Lulu down to take care of the dinner and ring the dinner bell precisely at half past twelve.

The school-room was in the third story, under the eaves, the checkered sunshine on the bare floor was its only carpet, the two windows were curtained with the skirts of the twins' last summer's white dresses, Bek's chair was a straight backed arm-chair with a rush bottom; the twins each owned a stool, while Lulu had the comfortable habit of curling up on the floor under the window. Books, papers and a writing-desk or two tried to keep themselves in order on the square, pine table, while Bertie's playthings gave the air of a kindergarten to the garret school-room. In winter this housetop nook would be too cool; but none of them planned for winter; the twins because they did not look into the future and Bek and Lulu because they did.

"What a queer old lady!" exclaimed Mrs.

Maurice in a lively voice, while geography and history were in a state of enthusiasm overhead.

"She *was* eccentric," returned Mr. Prentiss.

The breath of the August morning stirred the white muslin curtains of the nursery; summer was everywhere through the wide, breezy room. Mrs. Maurice was sitting in her spring rocker at the window, with some white work for Bertie upon her lap. How tenderly these last stitches were being taken! How many prayers for the baby's future were being stitched in! Mr. Prentiss in linen duster and with his straw hat upon his knees was sitting beside her. These two had needed no introduction: "You are one of the people that I have always known," she had said when he apologized for what might seem like intrusion.

"Mrs. Howe asked me not to tell you about the money until I deemed it prudent. I deem it prudent now. She loved Rebekah, she had loved her father. 'I want the girl to learn money's worth before she has money,' she repeated again and again. 'I want her to be a faithful steward.' She would have made thirty-five the condition of receiving it but I persuaded her to make it twenty-five. 'She will be wise

and mature at twenty-five,' I urged. 'She will be married by that time or be wise enough to make a wise choice.' If she marry a spend-thrift or one given to dissipation of any sort, the money is to go in another direction. I believe the old lady would have enjoyed making celibacy a condition, but I frowned upon that, celibate as I am. And she would have liked to describe the future sharer of her legacy, but I laughed her out of it. 'Do give the girl credit for common sense,' I said, 'and if she be like other women she would rather have her own choice than ten times your ten thousand.'"

"True of Bek emphatically," returned Bek's mother.

"I hope this may set your mind at rest concerning her temporal future—she will have compound interest, it will be rather a pretty little sum by the time she is ready to use it; she will have enough to work with or enough to rest with."

"And she will not forget the children," said the mother-heart. "I shall have to leave a request with you that she will spend a part of it for her own comfort. Bek's future was on my mind, I confess; Mr. Maurice has been losing

money and he naturally will take more thought for the others. The future is long, as the proverb says, and she may have only herself to depend on. She deserves it, Mr. Prentiss, she is a little bundle of unselfishness."

"I can easily see that," he answered, pulling the petals off one of the daisies that Bertie had brought to his mother.

A light step on the stairs and a glad voice at the door announced Lulu.

"I'm so glad you have come," she said frankly, "I know you will do mamma good."

"I wish I might," he answered earnestly as his eyes rested upon the fever flushed face and weary hands.

"He *has* done me good, Lulu," her mother said smiling as she leaned back and folded her hands, "he has given me something greatly to be thankful for."

Miss Southernwood entered after a few moments and Bek came in her neat gray muslin with her tender, watchful eyes and housewifely air. The talk was not merry, it could not be that with Bek's eyes so intent upon every movement of her mother and with the weary figure before them in the spring rocker.

"I haven't heard from Janet this long while," exclaimed Miss Southernwood.

"Of course you haven't. Nobody has. Don't you know what she is doing? She is studying in the Training School for Nurses and expects to give her life up to the work of nursing among the poor. Her step and hands and voice and eyes were made for such service and she is a spring of hopefulness."

"The blessed child!" ejaculated Miss Southernwood in a moved voice as her eyes met Bek's.

"She is a Christian worker," said Mr. Prentiss, "but I own that I was surprised when she came to me with her decision. She hesitated between New York and China for some time, and finally decided upon New York. 'I've shirked long enough,' she said in her characteristic way, 'and now I'm going to work. I've worked contrary to my own prayers long enough; I haven't even tried to do His will on earth as it is done in Heaven.'"

"Oh, is she thinking about that, too?" cried Lulu. "Bek and I talk about it."

"*Talk* about it!" smiled Bek.

"And Bek *does* it," concluded Lulu.

"She put the question in this way: 'Shall I

leave off praying, or leave off shirking?' And forthwith started for New York. I couldn't spare my housekeeper and helper in church work, but I had to."

"What shall you do without her?" questioned Miss Southernwood. "If it were not for Bek and for Rutledge Felix, I'd go home with you and take up some of her work."

"I only wish you would! The ones that cannot be spared are just the ones to go on such missions."

"Anybody can be wives and sisters," said Lulu, oracularly, "but anybody can't be a perfect nurse."

"I don't want anybody for a wife or sister," he retorted. "I want somebody that can't be spared from some mission."

"I should have chosen China," returned Lulu. "Mother, you would like that for me, wouldn't you?" she asked anxiously caressing her mother's pale hands.

"Yes, dear, if God sent you."

"Saints and angels love their work because it is of God's ordaining; their work is glorious and grand, but we people without a vocation have only odds and ends of work to do," Lulu answered dolefully.

"Odds and ends," exclaimed Miss Southernwood, indignantly. "God does not have any 'odds and ends' in His plan of work; little things are not set aside to be done at any time."

"But I do wish I might do angels' work," confessed Lulu, "earthly work gets rather dry and uninteresting."

"When an angel is sent down to work on earth what kind of work is he doing?" questioned Mr. Prentiss.

"But they are sent on glorious errands!" cried Lulu, enthusiastically, "just think of coming to Christ in the Garden! And of coming to Zacharias with the good news about John the Baptist."

"And of coming to Elijah with the cruse of water and even baking a cake upon the coals for him. And awaking him out of his sleep to eat and drink. Commonplace, wasn't it? Just as commonplace as for you to pick raspberries for the Parsonage. Don't you believe that this messenger came as cheerily to the tired, discouraged old prophet asleep under a tree to bring him water and bake him a cake as the angel that came to Zacharias when he was engaged in the temple service; that one brought water with as much zeal as the other brought

the glad news of the coming of the Forerunner of Christ."

"I'll think of that when I help in the baking," laughed Lulu. "I suppose it was excellent, not sour nor heavy cake, and the water was cool and fresh. Perhaps, Mr. Prentiss, that it was the same angel," she added, her eyes glowing with the new thought.

"John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elias," suggested Miss Southernwood.

"If it were the same, no doubt he was as willing to give one service as the other. Before honor is humility even in the upper kingdom."

"I thought I couldn't be like the angels unless I talked about holy things to people," acknowledged Lulu, "and I do not know how, even Bek doesn't know how as well as Miss Dunraven, but now I'll make currant jelly for old Mrs. Ives and take a Graham loaf to bedridden Miss Word and maybe that will be accepted. I'm only a girl, I don't know how to pray with them and talk to them. That angel was satisfied to speak to Elijah only to wake him up."

"They spoke when God gave them messages," said Mr. Prentiss, "sometimes we are a message in being only ourselves."

"This reminds me of a letter I promised to write for Miss Word; she has a married sister out west and would like it if I'd write every two days. But she has such queer things to say that it's poky work and I don't like it."

"As the angel said that was sent to write upon the wall of the king's palace," commented Mr. Prentiss very gravely.

"I'll do it this very afternoon," promised Lulu, solemnly, "just imagine—but we can't—a fretful, envious, wilful, discouraged angel, shirking God's work and doing something to please himself instead. I had planned to go after ferns with the twins this afternoon."

"Perhaps saints and angels do not have plans of their own," said Bek.

She had been too deeply interested to speak before.

"Why not?" interposed Mrs. Maurice, quickly. "Perhaps they ask to do certain things down here on the earth. It would be none the less God's errand that it was an answered prayer."

Bek's eyes were flooded with tender light. Was her mother thinking of *that*?

"Now you mean me!" said Lulu, seriously; "once I did pray that I might get money enough

to send somebody to the seashore—Anna Leport, Bek—and when afterward her mother asked me if I'd come often and amuse Anna while she swung in the hammock, in the back yard, I rebelled and didn't want to. I didn't go cheerfully at all, at first."

"What a queer angel!" exclaimed Mr. Prentiss. And then, in a reverent tone, "In Heaven His will is done instantly, submissively, rejoicingly, unquestioningly. The angels are ministers of His that do His pleasure. What a perfect definition that would be of perfect Christian workers."

Lulu looked troubled. "The angels cannot wish to do anything but God's will, and we do like to do ever so many other things!"

"Not if we renounce our own will, keeping nothing back," replied her mother.

"Then that's the first thing to do," assented Lulu, "and the first thing is the hardest."

"That petition in the Lord's prayer touches every thought of our hearts, every work of our hands," said Mr. Prentiss.

"And angels don't shirk," said Lulu, emphatically, "Michael doesn't say: Where is Gabriel? Lord, let him do this."

Bek smiled; it was like Lulu to ask, "Oh,

where's Bek?" This talk was but the prelude to many another, sometimes it was on the front piazza, sometimes in the shaded, grassy back yard, sometimes sauntering up the lane or seated among the mosses and dried leaves in the deep woods; wherever it chanced to be it was always of thoughts that kept close to their hearts.

The twins accompanied them upon their rambles and entered into their lighter moods, but the more earnest talks were usually in the nursery, or out on the piazza when Mrs. Maurice was strong enough to come downstairs.

Mr. Prentiss' month's vacation was a time they all delighted to look back upon. Miss Southernwood and Mrs. Maurice seemed to enjoy it as thoroughly as the girls.

One evening they were talking about forgiveness when Bek slipped away and returned presently with a sheet of note paper, placing it in Mr. Prentiss' hand she said simply, "Lulu wrote it and it helps me."

"Bek is always saying that I help her," declared Lulu. "I think she must be very easily helped."

Lulu did not even flush as Mr. Prentiss carefully read her little rhyme. She would have shown him anything that she had written, or played for

him any simple thing that she had composed with the same simplicity that Bertie brought him the blades of grass that he delighted in plucking. She was not at all "grown up" to him. She was afraid she never would be. It was one of her darling dreams that he should come some distant day and marry Bek. These two, the sweet-hearted daughter and sister at home, and the earnest, practical preacher, the minister of the Lord that did His pleasure, were her ideal man and woman. How Bek could help him and what strength and comfort he would be to her! It is not strange that the mother, on the borderland, so near leaving the daughter who had no father, should have thought of such a blessed future for her, as well. And Bek? He was too sacred in her eyes for her to dare think of such a thing. Beside—there were the children. There would always be the children even to the days of her old age.

Lulu did watch his face as he read and she flushed with pleasure when he asked if he might keep it.

"I'll read it to my little folks at home," he said.

She wrote it for the twins one day after Chip had been playing one of his pranks upon them.

“Mamma had come to say good night  
And take the lamp away,  
For three pairs of feet were tired  
With tramping the fields all day;  
And three little hearts were aching,  
For Bert, in the spirit of fun,  
Had hidden away their dinner,  
And left them to wander alone.

“But tearful, now, and repentant,  
He had sent mamma to say,  
That he wished they would forgive him,  
When she took the lamp away.  
Bess, cuddled down in her pillow,  
Promised she would, ‘But then,  
He mustn’t *ever* ask me,  
To play with him again.’

“‘And you, my little daughter,’  
Coaxed mamma of sleepy Mame,  
‘Oh, yes, I’ll forget, and forgive him,  
And love him just the same.’  
But Amy had been praying:  
‘As *I* forgive my debtor.’  
‘No: mamma, I’ll remember it,  
And love him *all the better.*’”

Mr. Prentiss came to say farewell the next morning. It would probably be a year before he came again, he told Miss Southernwood.

“Then you have something to come for?” she

asked with playful earnestness, resting her hand on her boy's shoulders.

"Yes," he said solemnly, "but I am not sure that I shall get it by coming for it."

"'Prayer and pains,'" she quoted.

"It will not be from lack of either," he returned in a low tone, as a girl's light step approached them.

An hour later Bek was writing to Mollie in her own room, the door opening into the nursery stood ajar. She had shaken hands with Mr. Prentiss in the hall and taken him into the nursery for a last talk with her mother. The low murmur of their voices reached her without disturbing her; she was giving Mollie a part of his last sermon and had lost all consciousness of his nearness to herself until her name in his voice arrested mind and pen.

"A sacred trust—come again—watch faithfully—precious—years—your heart at rest—" and then "Bek" from his lips once more and a low reply from her mother.

Her pen dropped from nerveless fingers. Did coming again mean—that? Was she so "precious" in his eyes? Was there something so good, so good for her? After all, when she had not been good!

Her head drooped low, her heart was too full to

speaking one word. Something good *was* coming to her, he was promising her mother, and he had the care of it; her mother's voice sounded glad, how could she help being glad, so glad too? What else could it be but—*that*?

“Would it be well for Miss Southernwood to know?” her mother was asking, “she will be with her—”

Bek arose softly and went out into the hall. When Lulu called her to say good-bye to Mr. Prentiss she was not to be found. Was it “too good to be true?” Were any of God's blessings too good to be true?

## XIII.

### PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE.

“Study the past if you would divine the future.”—CONFUCIUS.

IN the thicket across the fields a dove was moaning; the plaint had sounded in Bek's ears before her eyes were awake that morning. At intervals every day during the last weeks the mournful notes had floated over the fields. It was the only thing that was not lovely to Bek all this lovely summer time.

“How sweet that sound is,” her mother had said more than once.

If it had not been for that Bek thought she would have been impelled to rush wildly away from it. Lulu flew in one morning—Lulu was always flying in—exclaiming that she had discovered the doves; one had flown to a tree down by the spring and called and called until its mate had answered the call.

“Sometimes I long for wings like a dove that

"I may fly away and be at rest," said her mother; "next summer if the doves come again, think how glad I was to fly away."

This morning that the moan of the doves awakened her ushered in one of her days to be remembered. It almost seemed as if every one of these days were days to be especially remembered. But this day it was as if her mother gave her a white stone; she gave her a glimpse into her heart and therefore into the secret workings of her life. These last days were bringing her marvelously out of herself. Perhaps for Bek's sake she should have brought herself out of herself long ago; but God's light hand upon her had not done this, and because His light hand had not done it He had laid upon her His heavy hand.

If there is anything within us worth bringing out be sure that God will bring it out. Sometimes he *wrings* it out.

Day-lilies were scattered in the nursery in careless, fragrant fashion, the locusts were abroad. midsummer had come.

Yesterday, while Miss Southernwood and Lulu had stayed with her mother, Bek had worked at the sewing-machine in the back hall, but this morn-

ing, the machine work being finished, she had brought her work, white dresses for the twins, up to the nursery. They all loved the wide, airy chamber; Miss Southernwood said that it was like the upper chamber where Jesus came to His disciples. The name of it was certainly Peace.

She was working busily and a stranger who did not understand the sudden luminous leap into the eyes or the tremble about the lips when her words were lightest might have thought she was working cheerily. She did work cheerily as they work who hear the Lord say, "It is I, be not afraid." All the conversation was concerning to-day—all of it, unless her mother alluded to her future, to the future of them all; none of Bek's spoken plans touched to-morrow; she dared not trust herself to think of next winter, she hardly dared trust herself to think of next month. There would be no dreadful to-morrow in the kingdom up above; perhaps there was no dreadful to-morrow in the kingdom here below—Miss Southernwood told her there was not; but Bek's aching human heart was not yet filled with perfect faith.

"Honolulu! Honolulu!" cried Chip through the halls.

He insisted that he called Lulu this "for long." His mother smiled as the teasing, boyish voice rang through the house. Children's noises never disturbed her quiet, she would not have her children hushed and saddened by any burden of her suffering.

"You wouldn't know there was any one sick in the house," declared one of the neighbors. "I like to see some difference when death is so near."

But the "some difference" was in all their hearts, in all their prayers, and in the faces that hid themselves in the pillows when it was dark in the night. Other noises disturbed her quiet, however; the sound of her husband's voice in ill-humor, or in fault-finding with the children or with faithful Pauline; queerly enough, he never spoke impatiently to Bek. Perhaps he remembered the promise he had made to Bek's mother before she consented to become his wife.

"Promise me, in the presence of God, that you will never speak one unkind word to my child."

Bek would have loved her mother with even more perfect tenderness had she known of this thought for her,—little four year old. His latest trial—his wife's hopeless illness—seemed to be

developing all the inherent hardness of his nature. The neighbors called him "close" and "hard." Bek had not yet learned it; she had known him only in the sunshine of his prosperity. His wife was beginning to understand into what he might develop in the shadow.

"I am not a blessed trial to him," she had moaned to herself in the silence of the night. It was not physical pain only that gave haggardness to her face in the light of the morning. "Must I die before God answers my prayers for him?" she cried again and again in agony that could not be controlled. The prayer of twenty years! And he was still the same, moral and upright, as far as she knew, but still prayerless, still in secret rebellion against the will of God.

The soft cooing of the dove came to them across the field from the green slope down by the spring. One tear and then another dropped on the fluffy white mass in Bek's lap. If God would only let her mother stay a little longer—a little longer, until Lulu was really grown up and Chip in business, the twins married and Bertie—but when would she be willing? The solemn answer came: "When God makes me so! And He can make me willing to-day as well as

any other time." The other time was not His time, and this time *was* His time. When would she not plead a "little longer"?

"Mother," she said, abruptly, dropping her work from her hands, "were you willing at first?"

"'At first' was years ago—before the twins were born. I feel as if God had been giving me year after year. I have never told you, have I? O, my child, there have been so many things I have never told you! O, why haven't I been a *talking* mother. Bek, if you ever have daughters, *talk* to them, no matter how hard it is, say to them every thing you have to say. Will you?"

"Yes," promised Bek solemnly, remembering how she used to wish that her mother would talk to her about the Lord and help her to love Him, how she used to long to feel enough at home with her to tell her—everything. How she had cried once because she did not know what to do and had no one to ask! Lulu and the twins came to her with their questionings as she had never come to her mother. If her mother had been a talking mother she would never have given even the shadow of a promise to Dr. Prentiss.

Her mother's warning had come almost too late, as it was.

"I do not know any subject that it is wise for a daughter to know about that a wise mother may not speak plainly and judiciously about—but it was hard for me. I have not been a faithful mother and my children are better than I deserve."

"Now, mother," protested Bek, smiling through her tears, "you have loved us dearly."

"Yes, and that's all I've done."

"What about at first—so long ago?" asked Bek, distressed at her mother's contrition.

"How old are the twins? It was while Chip was little—you were too young to know about it—I had a tumor—or cancer—removed, and the physicians said I would have another and die! So I have been praying that it might not come year after year—and it has been coming. Dr. Hayes consulted with two eminent surgeons in New York last week concerning my trouble, and they decided that an operation might be performed and that I had one chance in one hundred to live—even now weakened as I am. I was willing to take that one chance for all your sakes, but your father said I was mad, and would not consent.

I had a cousin who died in half an hour after an internal tumor was removed. Your father will not let me," she repeated. "I would do it for your sakes. God might bless the skill He has given."

"I am not willing," said Bek firmly, "we have you and we will keep you as long as we can."

Lulu ran downstairs to chase Chip and box his ears, Bertie stumbled up the stairs with a handful of big blackberries, Nell and Floy ran in to see how their dresses were progressing, Pauline came up to show Mrs. Maurice the large, golden roll of butter that was to be sent to the Parsonage, Miss Southernwood entered with her bonnet on to take the message that Mrs. Maurice wished to send to Mrs. Ireton who was ill, and then after the pleasant bustle and the pleasant little talks Bek and her mother were again left alone.

"Girls love to look ahead, I used to," said her mother; "there is so much for girls to look forward to: possible wifhood and motherhood, and certainly hard work and good times. It is all delightful; my life has been full of happiness, with not half the sorrows that some have, but I do not want to live it over again. I have had enough of life. I would rather go home to my Father

than to take all your chances of happiness down here. My life has been a hidden life, there has been so much more in it than the eye has seen. There will be in your life, too. A life *hid with* Christ. If it were not for your father I'd be so content; but he grows bitter and hard, he rebels against God's will. Sometimes I think there is something preying on his mind, some new trouble—he has no money to lose, he has lost all his earnings and savings in those wild speculations, but he would not listen to me—he said I was a woman and did not understand business, which was true. Bek," her voice sinking and her lips quivering, "I would not tell you, I could not speak so of my husband if I were not going away to leave him and I want you to know, so that you may help him—but, Dr. Hayes advised it because he had dyspepsia, and because he needed a tonic, and he has taken it since every day, and oftener, and sometimes to make him sleep, and that is why he finds so much fault with Chip—he is excited and doesn't mean all he says—I want you to watch over him and keep him—he does not know how to bear trouble, he does not pray, and I'm afraid he will fly to that for relief when he—misses me."

Bek was already sobbing with her face in her hands, but her mother's eyes were tearless and her voice even.

"Promise, Bek."

"Yes," sobbed Bek. Oh, how many things she was promising.

"Another thing—" the quiet, even tone became rapid and intense, "remember there's no safeguard in marriage unless you marry a Christian—a real, living Christian."

"Why, mother," cried Bek, in surprise.

"I know you are surprised. Your father is as kind and loving as the day is long—but I know what I miss. I have missed it all these years and I miss it so now that I must be getting ready to die. Sometimes I think if your own father could kneel down and pray with me, my heart would burst with joy. I think over those times and cry like a baby. Your father found me crying about it and insisted that I should tell him what my tears were about. And when I told him, the great tears rolled down his cheeks. We haven't been together in the best things. We haven't lived *one* life. My own life, spiritual life, has been clogged and hindered; we have not been heirs together of the grace of life. O, Bek, don't you do so!"

"Mother, what made you?" asked Bek, seriously.

"Because I was so lonely and James Maurice loved me."

"You had *me*," said Bek, tenderly, not reproachfully.

"Yes, I had you, a toddling baby, but I wanted some one to love me and be sorry for me. It looked so long before you would grow up. I knew he did not attend church regularly, I knew he drank moderately as often as he felt inclined, I knew that he only listened to me because he loved me and not because he loved what I said; but he said he would do anything I wanted him to do and I believed him. There was no one to help me take care of you—I didn't know how to support myself and take care of you—I thought of Aunt Rebekah, but I supposed she had given your father all she had to spare, and I felt that I had no claim upon her. I did not know that she married a rich widower without children."

"Why! *Did* she? Then she didn't give me all her money. I thought she did. I wonder what she did with the rest."

"I knew he would be kind to you, and you would have a home to grow up in," her mother

continued evasively. "I see now that I made a mistake—my motives were not pure, I was altogether selfish. None but the very purest motives must influence a girl when she chooses to marry."

"I believe that," said Bek emphatically, with some embarrassment.

"I have been happier than I deserve; your father has been so good to me. I am not reflecting upon him, I am confessing my own weakness. I want to warn you. I want all my girls to live the *best* life. I want you to have the best God has for you. Knowing what the best was I chose the second best. Mr. Dunraven says the spiritual life of the church is clogged by the marriage of its members with those who are not Christians."

"I believe that too," said Bek.

Evidently Bek had thoughts of her own.

"I wouldn't like your own father to know how little I have done for the church he loved so much; and I had such dreams of usefulness when I was the minister's wife. I would like one of my girls to be a minister's wife and do the work I could not do—the work that was taken out of my hands."

Bek flushed and flushed as her head drooped over her work.

*Might* she be chosen for such happy work? Oh, how she would love to do it. And had not she a right to be chosen before the others because she was a minister's daughter? A right to be chosen! Ah, Bek, it is God who has the right to choose.

"I *hope* I have been father's blessing," faltered the poor wife; "he says so, but I have not brought him to God."

"You are everybody's blessing!" cried Bek, impetuously.

"I will not ask you to promise—I know you will not link your life with a life that is not consecrated to God's service."

Was there need to promise? Had not one whose life was consecrated spoken to her mother about her?

He was coming again.

"Did—God—ever—let—people—thank—Him—for something—that He had not—given them?"

The question came between quick catches in her breath; each pause a burden in itself, a burden of doubt; no one could tell her, she must live it through and find out for herself. She could not know *sure* until God told her. She could not

ask even Miss Southernwood. Was she deceiving any one because she had caught those few words of ambiguous meaning? Would Mr. Prentiss be sorry about it? Ought she to confess it to her mother? But how could she without confessing that she was glad, so glad, more glad every day? How she would need somebody when her mother was gone!

“Bek! Bek!” called Lulu from the lower hall, “Pauline is ready to show you how she cans peaches.”

She gave her mother a grateful, silent, appreciative kiss and then went down to the kitchen to learn how to can peaches, the peaches that her mother would not share with them.

Just then it seemed cruel to let the household ways go on; but would it not be more cruel to let them stop? So she listened with brimming eyes while Pauline reiterated that the cans must overflow and the covers be screwed on tight and the cans then turned over to stand on their heads so as to be sure that there was no place for anything to ooze out. “For if the juice can get out, the air can get in,” she repeated oracularly. Was this the same world that she had been living in ten minutes ago? Or was it only the difference

between up stairs and down stairs? Catching her breath with quick sobs she hurried through the kitchen, out to the coolness and quietness of the back piazza to seek to gather herself together, to bring eyes and lips into sweetness and brightness before she took them upstairs.

A stout figure clothed in linen pantaloons and a short linen coat, with a coarse, broad straw hat slouched over its face stood with bent head and folded arms leaning against one of the posts of the piazza. The moody, bent face was handsome and brown, with iron-gray hair and heavy iron-gray moustache.

"Bek," said the deep voice, "is that you?"

"Yes, sir," answered Bek, brightly. Bek could brighten her voice at an instant's notice.

He lifted his head, turned and looked at her.

"I've come to the jumping-off place; I suppose everybody does, once in their lives, and I've come to mine."

"Don't jump unless you have to," said Bek.

"I've got to—some time. I can't tell your mother. I've got to tell somebody. I've been cheated at last—it's righteous retribution; I cheated somebody once, and now it has come back on my own head," he added grimly. "I knew it would,

but people call such things business. I suppose it's somebody's business that the farm will have to go; it has all come of writing my name on a piece of paper to oblige somebody; I thought he was as honest as the day, and now to give three orphans back their money, Bek, I've got to sell this farm my father left to me."

"*When?*" asked Bek, turning very pale.

"Not till spring—she'll never know it," he answered, huskily, "and then it will take a long pull, a strong pull and a pull all together for us to get a living on a little farm nearer the village that can be bought cheap. The farm Murphy is on."

"*That!*" cried Bek. "Why he's a poor Irishman and works it on shares."

"Yes, but we are not poor Irishmen, and shall not work it on shares. I shall buy it, and fix up the old house, and earn my bread by the sweat of my brow, as better men have done before me."

"Mother won't know," was every word that Bek could utter.

"Don't you tell anybody on earth," he continued. But she might tell somebody in Heaven.

"Promise!"

"Yes," she promised wearily.

"I feel better now that somebody knows," he said, speaking more lightly, "if I could commit murder, I should want to run to the sheriff and tell him, for the sake of my peace of mind."

"But not for the sake of other people's," Bek could not refrain from saying.

He gave a quick laugh at her retort and started down the path whistling. The troubled heart upstairs gave a leap at the sound; there could be sounds of life and gladness in the home, there would be by and by, all would go on just the same.

Bek was thinking of the children; how they would miss the roomy house, the broad fields, the woods, the brook! It was of no use; eyes and lips could not be taken to her mother, she had to go away by herself.

## XIV.

### PEACE.

“Peace is rarely denied to the peaceful.”—SCHILLER.

Was it wicked to wish for money? But it was not for money; it was wishing to save their beautiful, wide home to the children, to the children who were her mother's only legacy; she could not earn it; years and years of labor would be required to earn so large a sum. By and by when they were compelled to take up their abode in that old, rickety house she would go back to Rutledge Felix. Lulu could be housekeeper and the little salary would make some difference at home. Her mother would never know their disappointment, privations and changes; there was need of such hard things in the kingdom on the earth. Poor little Bek was not brave in these days, she prayed some strong prayers and would have wept many weak tears, but that she must keep her face sunshiny for her mother.

Oftentimes the sunshine seemed to be struggling through a cloud. I do not know how it was, but she fell asleep more easily after her father had confided his trouble to her than she had done for weeks before; one sorrow seemed to help her bear the other, and then she was young and strong and in the future loomed up the prospect of something to *do*. - Something to do, while of late she had only had something to bear.

"Your daughter has character in her face," said I to a mother recently.

"Yes, but why don't she *do* something," was the irritable reply.

What was there for Bek to do in the world beside what she was doing? To be a loving daughter, an unselfish, loving sister, and in her small measure, a Tryphena or Tryphosa in the church: these were her present aims. In her dreams she may have had others; but there was little time for dreams in these full days. Dreams are enervating oftentimes, but in the known will of God there is strength. And Bek had the known will and the strength. The mother to whom I allude would have thought my Bek a very simple child for a woman of twenty-three; she would

have asked what she was doing with her education. She was doing with her education what she was doing with herself—her education was herself. Her “education” was to glorify God, as she did every day; and to enjoy Him, as she did every day. God thinks that doing something. Her world was such a little world; she did not even glance at her father’s daily paper. And this was the way in which she was learning new things and not forgetting the old. The world of Jennie Prentiss was not so narrow; she had found something to do out among people. Mollie Sherwood’s world was wider and narrower; since that last morning at Rutledge Felix she had lived simply to have a good time, and doleful indeed were some of the times she had had. Gertrude Raymond, disappointed and heart-broken was trying hard to be a patient wife; but, in secret, her soul recoiled from her weak husband, and she felt as if she *tugged* at her own heart to keep any love in it.

All this time Mollie Sherwood was not married; while she was travelling in Europe, Ernest Vanderveer broke his engagement, and married a friend of Mollie’s. I have been so absorbed in Bek that I forgot to tell you about it. Mollie

was not proud like Bek; she thought her heart was broken; but it was not a wholesome break; a secret bitterness rankled in the wound all her life—she became distrustful, morbid, and envious; she could not understand why God blessed others and passed her by. She did not love God, but she was afraid of Him. Her father was harassed in his business life, her step-mother was not in sympathy with any phase of her plans or hopes—they simply tolerated each other; for the last year they had spoken to each other only in Mr. Sherwood's presence. He never suspected their uncongeniality; they both loved him too sincerely to vex him with their misunderstandings. He had never been a rich man, and during Mollie's first year out of school, he became a poor one. Mollie poured all her troubles out to Bek, and wished that she might take life as serenely as Bek did; but she was not willing to take Bek's way of doing it.

Bek grieved about her friend; Miss Southernwood said that she had not changed, she was only developing. Bek was only developing, also. The change had been years ago.

Mollie, like the energetic girl that she was, began early in her father's embarrassments to look

around for something to do; she had not a particle of false pride, she would have become a shop-girl or chamber-maid to support herself and relieve her father. After answering many advertisements of various kinds, she at last bethought herself of Rutledge Felix, and wrote to Mrs. Graves just in time to learn that a teacher for the third grade was in request: Miss Southernwood had decided to remain with Bek Westerly, Miss Aiken would take her place, and Miss Cole would fill Miss Aiken's position. Mrs. Rutledge had a strong preference for Bek Westerly; Mollie had not been a hard student, but she would be a good disciplinarian, and had energy and conscientiousness enough to fit herself for her work. So Mollie went to Rutledge Felix in September without making Bek the long written about visit, and Miss Southernwood found herself comfortably installed in Bek's own chamber, and was told that she must consider herself a fixture for a lifetime. The interest of her savings and of a small sum that she had inherited would yield her sufficient support, and she might give the rest of her life to good works and have the comfort of the companionship of Bek Westerly, the girl of all girls whom she loved best. She almost felt as if, at last, she were the mother of daughters. All her

life her one enthusiasm had been—girls. And now with her own Bek, brilliant little Lulu, and the beautiful twins she would be perfectly satisfied.

I wonder if you do believe as fully as I do that we do have our heart's desire down here in the kingdom on the earth.

"I'm too glad to thank you," was all Mrs. Maurice could say when she unfolded her plan of boarding with them, becoming governess to Lulu and the twins, and, if she did not turn spendthrift in her old age, of bequeathing her little fortune to the one who should be the most in need of it. Bek, she knew, was provided for.

"And if the girls do not need it, there is Bertie," she had added.

The twins danced around her, Lulu wrote a poem about it, Chip declared it was jolly, Mr. Maurice thanked her in his cordial, abrupt fashion, and Bek's eyes were luminous all day long. Everybody began to feel rested. Mrs. Maurice said it helped her to go to sleep every night.

"Mrs. Maurice, you need a trained nurse," said the doctor one day; "it worries you to see the girls so tired."

"They will not consent," she protested.

"They will consent to anything that is good for you. Miss Southernwood, find a nurse for her."

"I will," said Miss Southernwood, remembering Jennie Prentiss. Miss Southernwood went in search of her that afternoon; the next day she found her at an orphan asylum taking care of sixteen children with whooping cough. It was a week before she could be released; when she came Mrs. Maurice was charmed; sleep and freedom from responsibility brought the color back to Bek's cheeks and the lightness to her steps. Bek always remembered Janet Prentiss as she stood in the doorway of the nursery that afternoon in the twilight. She was reading to her mother sitting beside the lounge, at a slight bustle and stir on the stairs she lifted her eyes and beheld the new nurse on the threshold. A tall, well-rounded figure in dark brown, a brown travelling hat with a dash of crimson about it; cheeks like the sunny side of a peach, eyes like the blue of the deep sea—that was all she saw, but she felt that one had come over whom the spirit of peace brooded.

"My dear," exclaimed Mrs. Maurice, stretching out both hands and raising herself to kiss her. It was the first time that Bek had ever seen her mother kiss a stranger. She was not a girl as Bek

had supposed, she was a self-poised woman, with authority in her voice and resolution in gesture and step.

"She would be perfect," Chip growled after a week, "if she didn't make you mind so."

"Yes," assented his father, "and she will spoil it all by getting married; these women with vocations always do."

"Miss Southernwood hasn't," asserted Bek, triumphantly, "and Mary Lyon did not, or Fredrika Bremer, nor—Queen Elizabeth."

"And perhaps getting married doesn't spoil it," added his wife.

"It spoils women for the world," he contended. "She can't take care of an orphan asylum after she is married, nor spend her life in the hospitals. And it is the women that the world can't spare that *are* married."

"The world can't spare them as wives and mothers," smiled Mrs. Maurice. Lulu became fired with zeal to study at the Training School for Nurses and Bek half promised that they would talk about it some day.

September with its golden days passed on, October came, and November, with its fire upon the hearth, was near its end before the Messenger

came. They had all learned how happy it was to wait every day for the coming of the Lord. "I will *come again* and receive you unto myself," promised the Lord. The last things had long been done, the last words almost said, but that new last words must be spoken every new day.

One afternoon in the dusk Bek sat with her mother alone. The white muslin curtains had been exchanged for crimson; she had dropped them an hour ago that the red glow upon the hearth might be the only light in the chamber. The lifeless fingers lay in Bek's warm clasp, moved only at Bek's will; it was days since they had lifted themselves. Her mother's eyes were on her face; Bek smiled and bent to kiss her fingers. That old caress! It had been one of Bek's baby habits, and she had kept it all these years.

"Perfect peace," murmured the pale lips. "Father prays with me—often," she went on in her low tone, "he is in the dark—but he is coming to the light."

"I am *so* glad!" Bek said joyfully. "I'm so glad you know about it, precious mamma."

"I was dreaming about you just now. I thought you were in your little bed, and you awoke in the night and put out your hand to find mine—

you used to do that even after Lulu was my little baby."

After a moment she said slowly as if to herself:

"But Bek will be provided for—Mr. Prentiss knows—"

Bek's head drooped and a hot flush overspread cheek and brow. Something about her future was a comfort to her mother even now. The eyelids dropped and she slept; Bek gazed into the red glow on the hearth until her own eyelids closed and she was dreaming that her mother was calling her.

"Bek—"

She started and bent over her mother.

"The children—" she whispered.

"Yes," promised Bek, quietly.

She fell asleep again, and at midnight the Bridegroom came and she went out to meet Him.

## XV.

### AT THE FIRST.

“The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed.”

“EVERYTHING must go on just the same,” Lulu often quoted.

Her mother had exacted a promise from each one that each would do her best to have everything go on just the same. So, just the same the rising-bell rang at six, the breakfast-bell at seven, and after breakfast in the cheery breakfast room family prayer in memory of another promise; they began the day in all the old ways: household work, study, music lessons—each one seeking to find some new interest for the other, each one speaking of “mother” tenderly, as often as they would, each one loving the others all the more unselfishly because one had been taken away. Everything that reminded one of a sleeping apartment had been removed from the nursery, and everything that could make it desirable as

a school-room brought into it; maps, globes, and desks were sent from Rutledge Felix, a box of school books and a pile of sheet music. Miss Southernwood was never more in her element; at last, she was teaching simply for love of it, as Mark Ryerson often wished that he might teach music, and the girls were studying simply for the love of it.

Bek studied regularly, also; Miss Southernwood declared that Bek would never outgrow being a school-girl.

Janet Prentiss was persuaded to remain "to rest" until the new year; Bek clung to her as to the older sister she had always been longing for; none of them could sufficiently express their gratitude for the loving, faithful service she had rendered all through those days of waiting.

The long letters from her brother that she read them as a special privilege over the school-room fire was one of the rare pleasures of her visit.

Bek always listened, her face averted, a mist veiling her happy eyes; Lulu listened as she had listened to his preaching, flushed, eager, with words of enthusiasm afterward, never forgetting to send a message, but Bek, painfully self-conscious, had never a word to say.

For a week after her mother's death Bek had lived as if in a dream; nothing seemed worth while, all she desired was to lie still with her eyes closed from morning until night sobbing or moaning, or praying hysterical prayers. But they would not let her have her way; the children came with demands all day long, Miss Southernwood and Janet talked about everything as usual, even Lulu would rouse her from a reverie with a question about something for dinner or supper. It was of no use, she decided, at last, people did seem to need her; she might as well begin again, as she had begun again once before. It had come; it was over and she could breathe again. She was not unhappy; she could give thanks because of her mother's peace and joy; even in the quiet routine of her days there was much to do and much to think about. And then there was the future; hopeful girlhood has always a future to look forward to. Had it not been for plans and hopes concerning the dreaded change in the spring, her days would have been what you might call "humdrum," like the most of your days, perhaps, with nothing happening. The most of her days all that winter were dull and plodding, with their quiet round of occupation, with only the amusement she

made for herself and the children. But there was an undersong of hope, faith, peace, joy, filling her days because she listened to it. And it was in her face, voice and step because it was in her heart. All her tears for her mother were soft, blessed tears. Even when she was troubled Bertie's voice and caress had power to bring her back into his sunshiny world. It would have been a happy winter were it not for visions by night and by day of that old, little red farmhouse where Murphy the Irishman lived. At times the remembrance of it weighed upon her like a nightmare. No one knew it beside herself; she had no one to bear it with her. Her father had never made another allusion to it, but she read the truth every day in his knitted brow, absent manner, and gloomy eyes. No one could help her; not Miss Southernwood, or Janet, not even Janet's brother; Mr. Ryerson had helped her once, but how could he help her now? And how would God help? By keeping their home for them, or by teaching them how to live in the old, red, tumble-down house? He had the power to do either; which would He choose to do? To await His choosing with faith, with patience and with all the cheer she could muster gave a zest to her

quiet days. It was one of the secrets that she would know by and by.

Lulu read aloud the daily paper every evening, thus becoming interested in the movements of the great world; her remarks were so often laughable and shrewd and her questions so much to the point that she beguiled the dull evenings for her father and caused him often to forget his hour for retiring. She read the biographies of statesmen with Chip, and talked them over with him with a boyish enthusiasm; Bek was often dreamy and pre-occupied, but the whole world was Lulu's own, to learn about, to wonder about, to sympathize with and to seek to understand. If it were not for that Training School for Nurses she thought she would like to start out and travel all over the world. Fredrika Bremer's life was one of her enthusiasms. With splendid health, high spirits, and life all before her, how could she but rush and tingle through her days of promise?

"I mean my life to be a *success*," she exclaimed one day. "I wonder what success is—to a girl, a woman," she added thoughtfully.

That afternoon she was sitting over the school-room fire reading with moistened eyelashes about the last days of Mary Somerville. Certainly *her*

life had been a success. A light step paused at the threshold, a light tap touched the door; as the light tap met with no response, the door was pushed open and a face looked in. A young face with an old expression; cheeks faded with care, eyes sunken with sorrow or illness, a drawn look about the lips, a hollowness and yellowness about the temples that one sees in age. The face was sweet and pretty still; it reminded one of what it had been, of what it might be, if the heart were at rest.

"Gertrude Raymond!" exclaimed Lulu in surprise, springing toward her. "I thought your fever would not let you venture out in a snow-storm."

February was not a spring month this year; it was a month of snow-storms.

"Oh, I don't have it every day," she answered carelessly; "the doctor says these continued fevers are hard to break up. He thinks, perhaps, my normal condition is to be abnormal. I begin to think it is, myself."

Moving slowly to the fire she dropped down upon Bertie's hassock, and held her hands to the blaze, shivering and laughing a little. Nowadays Gertrude laughed oftener than she smiled.

"Bek sent me up; she thought I would find Miss Southernwood here."

"She was here an hour ago; to-day is one of her anniversary days."

"Anniversary days?" repeated Gertrude.

"Yes, she has so many she keeps a register of them. In two days it will be the anniversary of the marriage of one of her girls and of the widowhood of another; she is to write to each of them so they will receive it on that day. She lives in so many persons lives. She never lets any one go. She was quoting to me to-day something about keeping our friendships in repair. The letters she receives are legion. Chip threatens her with the expense of a leather mail-bag. She gives us glimpses into so many lives. We would be forlorn without her and Janet. I suppose she is in her own room writing. This room and Miss Southernwood's room are our sanctuaries."

"That's what I've come for, to find a sanctuary," said Gertrude, in a hopeless tone. "I wish she would write to me. She used to; but I did not answer her last letter."

"You haven't an anniversary yet. I'm always having anniversaries; some private and personal anniversary."

"I hate anniversaries; sometimes I hate everything."

Lulu looked at her and then looked into the fire. She did not know how to talk to any one who hated everything; there seemed nowhere to begin.

Re-opening her book she asked: "Isn't Bek coming up soon?"

"Why? Do you want to get rid of me?"

"Yes; I don't know what to say to you next."

"I don't believe she does either; I don't believe anybody does. I'll have the luxury of silence now for awhile. What a blessed thing it would be if people didn't speak when they had nothing to say! I left Bek teaching the twins how to make biscuits for tea. Has your good old Pauline left you at last?"

"She has gone to see that sister of hers who is an invalid, for a week or two. She would take Pauline away from us if she could, but she never can. She says she will stay until the last of us is dead or married."

"It doesn't matter which, I suppose," laughed Gertrude.

As the twilight deepened, the glow upon the hearth brightened; in its light, or because of something else, the color begun to flush the wan

cheeks, and the drawn look about the lips gave place to a sweet, grave restfulness. No one but God could comfort Gertrude Prentiss, and no one but God did. Her mother worried her, her grandfather lectured her, and her husband was breaking her heart; for people do not always die with broken hearts.

With her heart at leisure from any sorrow, Lulu dropped into her book again, and Gertrude gazed straight into the fire, not seeing it or anything; yes, she did see something,—she saw her husband's face. She thought she always saw it. She had a fashion of coming often to see Miss Southernwood, therefore Lulu thought no more of entertaining her than she thought of entertaining Bek herself. Gertrude was never entertained, nowadays, she could never forget herself. Awakening from sleep she not seldom found the tears of a forgotten dream upon her eyelashes.

Turning suddenly from the fire she studied Lulu a long while, her face, her attitude, her absorption in her book; it was so long since she had lost herself in a book like that. But she knew she had once—even after she came from boarding-school.

“Lulu!”

But Lulu did not hear.

"Lulu, I envy you," said the wistful voice.

"Because I've something to read and you haven't?" queried Lulu, lifting her eyes for one instant.

"No."

"Because I'm a genius?" she questioned soberly.

"You may be, but it isn't that!"

"Because I'm a beauty, or an heiress, or because I'm going to do to-morrow the thing I want to do."

"If that were all true, it wouldn't be for that."

"Then, what is it pray?" Lulu asked with questioning, laughing eyes.

"I envy you because you have opportunity," Gertrude answered seriously.

"Opportunity to do what? Distinguish myself?"

"To do the best thing," she answered evasively.

"The best thing just now means to run downstairs to assist in the general confusion. Chip and I are to make molasses candy to-night, and I ought to be picking out the nuts for it while he cracks them this very minute."

She arose and laid her book upon her desk and darted out, a bird of brilliant plumage in her

clinging, crimson merino and a narrow band of crimson velvet binding her hair.

"What a warm, soft, bright, coaxing, lovable little creature she is!"

The voice was above Gertrude's head, in an instant motherly arms were about her and lips that never rebuked were touching her brow.

"Well, Snow-bird, have you flown into our warm nest?"

"I wish I might, and stay forever," she returned in a shuddering voice. "I begged Julius to bring me, he had to pass the house, but he will not come back this way, so I can stay all night. I was getting desperate."

"Poor child," comforted Miss Southernwood.

"If I might only go down-stairs and be a girl again, and laugh and have fun! Just hear that! And how Bek sings! Just as she used to at school. And I feel like an old woman. If Bek Westerly or Lulu or Mame Dunraven or Janet had a husband who was on his way to a sick-room with his brain bewildered, and his eyes bloodshot, and with cubeb berries in his mouth to disguise his breath, they would grow old before their time as easily as I do," she returned brokenly and with sobs.

She had no pride with Miss Southernwood; she could pour out her bitter heart to her as easily as in her prayers.

"Sit down, child."

She was trembling and shivering; she was glad to obey, she threw herself down upon the hassock again.

In her very practical manner Miss Southernwood stirred the fire and laid two knotty sticks upon it. Chip growled somewhat about the armfuls of wood he had to bring up night and morning for this fire, but Miss Southernwood assured him that she wished she had a mission herself to keep up a fire upon somebody's hearth.

"No one knows but you; mother worries me and worries about me, but she doesn't know half, and grandfather talks to us both because we are not 'consistent.' Dr. Mason knows something, but he doesn't know all; nobody knows all. Julius gave a patient quinine powders instead of morphine the other night. Suppose it had been morphine instead of quinine! Now he carries the morphine in his pocket, and the quinine in his medicine case. I threatened to tell Dr. Mason if he would not. Now that we are boarding with Dr. Mason, I live in con-

tinual fear that he will discover something that Julius does. He was too stupefied with brandy to answer a call last night, and I had to get up and ask Dr. Mason to go, and to say that my husband was not able to go out. He looked sharply at me, and oh, how he looked at Julius this morning! But he looked sick enough, if that were all he wanted to discover. He has kidney disease and some doctor told him he had brought it on by drinking; he knows it himself. How he deceived all Clovernook! I am sure Dr. Mason intends to do something. Julius has certainly forfeited all right to his confidence. He threatens to leave me with mother, and go West to find a place to settle; but if he ever breaks away from me he'll grow worse and worse. Every place is the same to me; we would come to disgrace anywhere. I think he doesn't want me to go with him," she continued quietly, "he would feel freer without me. I try not to reproach him, but sometimes the words burst out of me. He knows how I turn from him when he is—— I believe I loathe him. I reminded him to-night as we were driving along how he told me again and again before we were married that he never touched

liquor unless he were ill. And I suspect he had been drinking when he said it. I was so innocent and his breath was always so pleasant. I used to laugh about his keeping his breath perfumed, and he said that it was that he might be pleasant in sick-rooms. I thought I knew him through and through. I used to think I could read human nature; but a wicked man was too much for me. Oh, how I believed in him!"

The passionate words were spoken in a passionless tone; in her eyes slept a dead calm.

"I cannot take his word about anything. I believe there isn't anything that he hasn't told me a lie about. His moral sense is blunted. Sometimes he takes opium when it is impossible for him to drink. If I could love him, I could bear it better; but often I do not even pity him. I only despise him. I want to do right because it *is* right. I know I love God if I do not love—my husband."

Her lips quivered as she forced them to say "my husband."

"I try to say it to myself," she said pitifully. "I think it helps me feel that he belongs to me, I cannot feel that I belong to him. I don't

like to have God think of me as a part of him; I don't want to be 'one flesh' and I couldn't be 'one spirit.'"

"Do you ask Him to give you love to your husband?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I don't want to love him. I can't love any one like him. There isn't any place in my heart for the love to be put."

"He can make a place."

"Does He want me to love him?" she asked in a child's tone.

"Answer that question yourself," Miss Southernwood answered patiently.

"Perhaps He never wanted him to be my husband at all," she evaded, wilfully.

"He permitted it; and you are his wife. God expects you to do—requires of you to do the wife's perfect duty. Love your husband, for Jesus' sake."

"I don't know how," she moaned. "I loved him once for his own sake, and now he hasn't any sake of his own."

"I have no other word for you."

"I don't know what it means, and how it

means *for Jesus' sake*. Shall I love him because Jesus loves him? I don't see how Jesus *can* love him?"

"Do you see how He can love you?"

"No," she said, after a moment, "I don't. Miss Southernwood—don't reason with me!" she implored, "I've worn myself out reasoning with myself. Awhile ago I sat here so comforted, feeling so happy and *forgiven*, and now it surges over me again and overwhelms me. I cannot always forgive him, and it is that that hardens my heart. And I cannot forgive myself for not hearkening to my mother and Mr. Dunraven. I was angry with Mr. Dunraven; I told him he had no *right* to come and talk to me. I was so sure I could be all that Julius needed. He said I could. But he deceived me about Janet. I would not have taken him away from her, although," with a dreary laugh, "she may thank me for doing her such a service."

And Bek! Happy Bek! But Gertrude never knew of Bek's danger and escape.

"When I go home and see mother needing me every minute and think of her missing me in the storm to-night, I am frantic. She may have another stroke any day, Julius says. And

I might have been so happy to-night, without a care and without a dread. And I am dying by inches because I am worried to death. It is all I have lost as well as what I have gotten that is killing me. I think the lost spirits must be miserable because of losing Heaven as well as because of being in hell."

She grew quieter as she thus poured herself out; if intense quietness could grow quieter; pitying fingers touched her hair, the pitying lips had no new word of help to give.

"Julius drank himself stupid more than two or three times on our wedding journey. Tennyson's words: 'Widowed marriage pillow' kept haunting me. I was a forlorn bride enough! I wonder I didn't go wild. Perhaps I did; he said he didn't know any woman could talk herself exhausted. He is not unkind to me. He sheds tears, and makes promises, and turns neat sentences about repentance, and reminds me that I am the angel on earth that rejoices over the sinner that repents. But his repentance doesn't last a night and a day."

The pitying fingers smoothed her hair; the pitying lips were silent. For what sorrow was like unto this sorrow?

"He carries a flask in his breast pocket; he has it to-night; he said it would be cold driving back. I tried to steal it away, but he detected it and was furious. Gipsy starts at every little thing; she has run away with him once. He had to take her to-night because the horse he drives at night is lame. He has four calls to make to-night; Dr. Mason will not go out at night unless he is compelled to. The road to Lakeview is very lonesome; I almost wish I had gone with him. He likes me to go with him in the evening; he coaxed me to go to-night, but I felt ugly and refused. I wish I had gone with him; he isn't very strong. Oh, I *do* want to be a good wife to him! I wanted him to take the boy, but he said he went away this afternoon with Dr. Mason. I suppose mother will think of him to-night, she used to like him so much before she knew he thought of me. Sometimes I think he would never have thought of me if I had not loved him so much; I suppose he could not help feeling it as much as I tried to hide it, and he said he had been troubled, and I was sent to him in just the right time. How happy I used to be; I used to weep for very gladness."

"I trust you will again, dear."

"I don't know; I can't hope so. If Julius had

changed I might hope it; but he isn't changed, he is only revealing his real life. I loved my imagination of him. He deceived me because he was deceived in himself. He really believes that he does repent, but I know that he doesn't; he confesses, but that is all."

"Does he confess to God?"

"I asked him that, and he laughed; but one night when he was sick he was frightened, and asked me to pray; and the next day he laughed at himself for being afraid. I wish I knew how mother is to-night. Julius promised to call there to-morrow, but he will put it off. She is sitting and reading there alone, for grandfather has gone to Aunt Sarah's; she can't knit or sew because of that poor, right hand. I am her poor right hand now. I will certainly go to see her to-morrow. If she should have a stroke in the night, Susan would never know; she sleeps in a cot in mother's room, but she is such a hard sleeper."

"My dear, I am glad you came to me to-night. Your mother is not alone." How strong and alive and full of good cheer this voice sounded in contrast with the pathetic stillness of the other voice.

"Miss Southernwood, you never had any trouble." Gertrude suggested rather than inquired.

“Not any of my own with sin in it. Twice in my life I have thought that I had more than I could bear. But I did bear it, and I am growing more and more into a happy old woman without any heart-ache at all of my own. If every woman would tell her story to-night, we would know that all the world of womanhood has something hard to bear.”

“Bek and Lulu seem as bright as ever; when I came in Bek was tumbling Bertie over on the carpet, and they were both laughing so hard they did not know I was in the room. But theirs is a happy trouble. And Janet Prentiss is as full of life as a lark! But they haven't any of them anything dreadful to look forward to. I'm afraid it will kill me when everybody knows about Julius. Often I think I am more afraid of the disgrace than the sin. I want him to go far away before he is so bad that he has to give up practice. But would you mind telling me about your trouble? I like to know that I am not sorrowful above all the world.”

How pretty her intonation was! Miss Southernwood had been proud of Gertrude Raymond at school.

“Of course I will tell you. I am not such a lonely old woman that I cannot speak of it.

Before I was as old as you are I was engaged to a young doctor; he was the brother of Janet's father. We had all fair promise for the future, but he died. Several years later—there was a convention, a convention of ministers; it was in vacation and I was at home. Mother entertained three of them. Among the three was one who found me worth loving. I had not forgotten, but I learned to love this new friend as sincerely as I had loved the other. He *helped* me as John Prentiss helps Bek and Lulu and Mame Dunraven, and how I hoped to have him all my life, to grow like him and to work at his side. But he died, too."

Gertrude did not speak. What was there to say? Long ago Miss Southernwood had been comforted, and she was comforting others with the comfort wherewith she had been comforted. Gertrude bent forward to extinguish a spark that had snapped out upon the rug; Miss Southernwood remembered that the curtains had not been dropped; when she came back to the fire great tears were shining in her eyes—great, soft tears that were full of peace.

"Sometimes," said Gertrude, as Miss Southernwood seated herself in the arm-chair opposite her,

"I get frightened—I have so little faith. I used to think that I had enough to go through anything. I have been praying so long for Julius, and my prayer has not been answered, not even begun to be. I heard Mr. Müller, that faith man from Bristol, that keeps up so many schools on faith, say that he had been praying twenty or thirty years for a friend, and it was not answered yet; and he has such mighty faith. I don't dare to stop praying, but I have no faith, not an atom. I've been praying that he might see Christ, know Him and love Him, and there isn't the first evidence of change in him. I have prayed with my whole heart. He seems to be more in the dark than ever. He says his uncle is an enthusiast; he acknowledges that it is a blessed enthusiasm. Now, help me, please."

Miss Southernwood thought a moment, then she drew her willow work-basket nearer and from under the pile of sewing drew forth her little Gospel of Mark.

"I was reading it this very morning, but I did not know that I was reading it for you. You find the place, and look on in the fire-light to help you understand, and I'll tell you about it. It's in the eighth chapter, beginning at the twenty-

second verse: the beautiful, true story of the blind man whom his friends brought to Jesus. He was blind like your Julius, he could not find the way himself, so his friends brought him with them, as you have brought time and time again your blind husband. They brought him, but he did not plead for himself; he could not see Jesus, and they could. They 'besought' for him. Perhaps he was discouraged about himself, perhaps he did not believe the wonderful stories his friends told him about the new Prophet, perhaps he called them enthusiasts, perhaps he had no heart to speak until he heard the voice speaking to him. As he could not see the face, it may be that he was waiting for the encouragement of the voice. Each of us must see Jesus for himself; Julius cannot see Him in your way. And then, oh, how blessed! at the urgency of his friends, Christ took the blind man by the hand. Perhaps, very probably, the blind man did not even stretch out his own hand. Remember, like your husband, he could not see. But the Lord did not touch his eyes. And that was what his friends had besought Him to do. We have no record that He spoke a single word to him. He only led him away; led him away in the dark."

Gertrude gave a little sob. Oh, if He were only leading Julius all this long while in the dark. But how could He be leading him while he was growing worse and worse!

"He led him away from his friends—away to be with Him, out of the town. He had given the friends no assurance of a cure; all they could see was that Christ had him by the hand."

"I think that was enough," said Gertrude in a moved tone.

The passionless voice was gone; in forgetting herself and in thinking of Christ her life had come back.

"They had the sure knowledge that He would act just like Himself. They must have been content to leave him with the Lord leading him by the hand. And now let us leave those who had asked and follow him who was led. It may be that the distance seemed long to the blind man, he did not know whither he was going; but I am sure that he had begun to trust in his Guide. Perhaps in that walk the Lord taught him who it was that had him by the hand. Don't you think that his faith grew with every step that he felt the sure grasp of that hand."

"But he was willing to go now; he was going

of himself," interrupted Gertrude, "he could have broken away from Christ—as Julius does."

"You do not know how often he feels the touch of Christ's hand. The friends were left behind. And even, when outside the town, away from the tumult that his sharpened hearing was accustomed to, and after his wondering confession, 'I see,' how did he see? He saw men as trees walking. He might have said that one who spoke of the men or the trees was an enthusiast."

"Yes," assented Gertrude, in a full tone.

"After that—in his peculiar case, this experience had to come first, the Lord touched his eyes again and bade him look up. And then he saw every man clearly, even the face that was looking at him with eyes full of sympathy, and then, with his happy, clear-seeing eyes he went back to his friends. It has been said that no one but Christ ever opened the eyes of the blind; also, no man cometh unto the father but by Him. There was work to be done, waiting to be done, by the friends of the blind man. They brought the blind man and left him with Christ. That is all you can do. In his slow, patient, wisest way Christ is working for you both. Your prayer is not large enough to include two lives, your life and his, but His answer is."

"I know my prayer is selfish. I think more of my own yearning than of anything else; it is like a pain, and I must cry out until it is eased."

"He knows that, and He is teaching you how to pray, not for yourself, but for him. If it is only like a pain, there is no more of love to your husband in it, no more of love to Christ in it than there is in any prayer to be relieved from pain. It is ease for yourself you are crying for."

"And I think too much of my prayers; I forget there is any other way for him to be saved. I give up a whole day to pray for him, and then I feel not only like a saint but a martyr."

Miss Southernwood could not but smile at her rueful face. Gertrude could always probe her own wounds. Floy ran up to summon them to tea with flour on her hair and on the bib of her brown checked apron.

"Are you Floy or Nell," asked Gertrude looking puzzled. "I thought Floy wore a blue apron this afternoon."

"Look at me and decide," laughed Floy.

"I look but I can't see," said Gertrude. "You are the same height, the same breadth, you dress exactly alike and you look exactly alike."

"I think Nell is prettier," said Floy.

"Now I know which you are."

"Papa doesn't know always until we laugh, and Bek's Baby never knows. Miss Southernwood didn't use to know," she said triumphantly.

"But I know now, you little witch; you can't deceive me. Nell's face is rounder and her eyes are fuller, and she never looks sharp," said Miss Southernwood.

"And she's never naughty, so *now* you know! And my hair curls tighter than hers, and she's half an inch larger around the waist. We didn't make the candy because papa said we mustn't waste the molasses; so we're going to have the nuts to-night and make believe the candy is all eaten up. He *used* to let us make all the candy we wanted!" she added, soberly.

After supper Bek caught her baby in her arms and ran away with him up to the school-room fire to sing to him, to tell him stories, and to rock him to sleep. Seated in her mother's spring rocker with the chubby white figure cuddled in her arms and the yellow head resting contentedly against her shoulder, with the wild beating of the storm without and the cozy comfort within, with the light and life and laughter and voices down-stairs, with all her present to enjoy hour by hour and

all her happy future to look forward to, it was no marvel that she felt herself to be as satisfied in the life chosen for her as any of the Father's children down here away from Him—nay, not so, down here with Him.

To-night, in the firelight, her face appeared as sweet, as free from care, as in her school days; a little wiser, a little older, perhaps, but not sorrowful.

"Tell me over about the robin birdie," coaxed Bertie, sleepily touching her lips with his plump, pink fingers. It was one of their father's stories, but each of them repeated it again and again to bird-loving Bertie.

"Well," she began in a drowsy, sleep-provoking tone, "one day last summer papa found a baby robin with a red breast on the grass under the crooked apple tree. Papa and Mamma Robin and all the little brothers and sisters were up in the tree, in their soft, pretty nest, and this poor little creature had fallen out, down to the ground, and could not fly back again. So she hopped around on the green grass and cried out in mournful little cries because she was hungry, and Mamma Robin up in the tree heard the cries and brought her something to eat. And, oh, how glad little birdie was to see mamma and have something

nice to eat! So she hopped around on the grass, and when the sun was too hot she hopped to a big, shady burdock leaf and crept under and had a lovely home all to herself. And every time she was hungry she cried, and Mamma Robin brought her a nice little worm to eat, or perhaps a currant, or a bit of raspberry. Three days papa saw her hopping around and saw Mamma Robin come to feed her, and one morning he went out—it had rained hard all night—and found the little creature all wet, and dead on the ground. The rain had killed it in the night.”

“Oh,” sighed Bertie as he sighed every time, “was it dead?”

“Yes, it was dead.”

With another contented sigh he nestled closer, patting her cheek with his fingers until his hand fell and he was asleep. When Gertrude re-entered Bek was sitting over the fire alone.

“Dreaming, Bek?”

“Yes,” Bek started, “and I ought to be mending Bertie’s shoes. It would be altogether more profitable.”

“Must you light a lamp?”

“No, I can see in the firelight.”

Bek brought her work-basket and knelt on

Bertie's hassock with his red shoe in her hand. Three buttons were missing and there was a rent at the side.

"Lulu has been asking me what success is," said Gertrude, slipping into the spring rocker.

"Success just now is mending this little boot neatly," returned Bek gravely. "Awhile ago it was a music lesson and making biscuits. I make my successes as I go along."

"I see you do," said Gertrude, with a slight hardness in her tone. "I made mine all at once—in one bold stroke."

"Mine isn't made yet then, I suppose you think," questioned the shoe-mender, holding the red boot closer to the blaze.

"Your father said it was doing what one started out to do; he had started out to get rich and he had failed."

"Hasn't he tried to do anything else?"

"He didn't say. I asked Miss Southernwood if her life were a success, and she said yes. Chip said he had started out to be a first-class farmer, and the twins said they had started out to go to Rutledge Felix and be graduated after Miss Southernwood had taught them enough to enter for the last year."

"What did Lulu say?"

"Oh, Janet Prentiss has infected her!"

"What did *you* say?"

"I?" laughed Gertrude. "There's nothing left for me; I've done it all."

"You haven't even begun," said Bek, in a voice of sharp rebuke. "Go home and begin to be a success to-morrow."

"I shall never succeed," she answered listlessly.

"You will succeed better than if you do not try at all," said Bek, energetically.

"I suppose that's logic. How the wind blows! I wish I knew that Julius were safe at home." She seldom said "my husband."

"Do you remember what Mr. Dunraven preached about last Sunday?" she asked suddenly as she watched the movement of Bek's needle.

"No; Bertie had a cold and I did not go out."

"You missed something. It was this, or something like it: 'Because ye did it not *at the first*, the Lord our God made a breach upon us.' God forgives us for not seeking His will at the first, but He punishes us by permitting us to suffer the consequences."

"Yes," said Bek.

"That time, *at the first*, can never come back

to us. Do you remember how I whispered to you that I was turning my first corner?"

"Yes."

"I had decided then to do—what I did do."

"In David's case—it is about bringing the Ark home, isn't it?—it was made right afterward; there was a festival sacrifice and great joy," said Bek.

"Yes, Uzza had been smitten in anger; he died before the Lord. There must have been grief about that—God's forgiveness and teaching them how to bring the ark back did not bring Uzza back to life," answered Gertrude, very gravely.

"It was because they did not even seek to learn God's will about it."

"They did not *at the first*. Oh, how those words are burned into me! We can only have the first once—"

"You can have the first as a wife," comforted Bek, "there's a first in everything, you know."

"But you can have the first in the very beginning—you need not suffer for wilful sin at all, or for sin of ignorance."

"I hope not," was the earnest, almost vehement reply. "If we *set out* to obey—we shall be led."

"You have set out to obey, that is why you

succeed. I set out to do some grand thing—and I've done it."

The shoe was mended and laid away. Bek proposed music, but Gertrude said she could hear no music except the blowing of the wind. Bek fell asleep with the yellow head and warm cheek close to her face and the clinging arm about her neck. Gertrude slept fitfully; in her dreams she was out in the snow where the wind was blowing.

In the morning Dr. Mason's boy came for her; Dr. Prentiss could not come, he said evasively, and she asked no questions. At the door incoherent motherly Mrs. Mason gathered her into her arms, and bade her not be frightened, it would soon be all over, and it was such a mercy that his life was spared and the doctor would be a great deal kinder than his words, and they might stay until her husband was able to be moved.

"Was he thrown?" asked Gertrude, calmly.

"Yes, and a leg and arm broken—nobody knows how it happened. Gipsy rushed home with the sleigh in splinters, and the doctor and James went in search of him and found him in the snow, unconscious, and brought him home. He was delirious, and called for you, but I wouldn't

let them go for you and waken you out of sleep and frighten you. Don't faint, dear, there's no real danger and you mustn't mind anything my husband says. It *was* a cold night, and I don't believe he *meant* to take so much," she said pityingly.

It had come then, the disgrace she had dreaded; they would all know—she was a drunkard's wife. At that instant, her own disgrace was more to her than her husband's danger. She even turned impatiently away from the weak moan that greeted her quiet entrance:

"O, Gertrude, I am ashamed to look you in the face."

## XVI.

### PLANS AND PROMISES.

“Strong reasons make strong actions.”—SHAKESPEARE.

BEK stood at the kitchen table ostensibly breaking stale bread into crumbs for the purpose of making a bread pudding, but her fingers moved hesitatingly and her eyes were riveted upon something out of the window; she had been standing in this position several minutes not heeding the laughing voices nor the clattering of the breakfast dishes as the twins piled them upon the table preparatory to the ceremony of washing them. Chip had brought in the news about Dr. Prentiss, with the addition that the old doctor had told everybody that he would send him away as soon as he was able to be taken away.

“How can Gertrude *live*?” she had said to Miss Southernwood.

But she was not thinking of her at this mo-

ment; her father's harassed face was in her mind, and his depressed, gloomy voice at the breakfast table. Every day was one day nearer and no help had come; she had looked around, now she was only looking up.

"Lulu!" cried Floy, "look under the table! You did not sweep clean yesterday."

"How could I when you were both standing there washing dishes? I did the best I could under the circumstances."

"Yes," said Floy, demurely, "you swept under the circumstances instead of under the table."

The shout that greeted this repartee brought Bek back to herself.

Lulu with a scarlet sweeping cap drawn over her curls stood leaning on her broom; Floy in brown checked kitchen apron was flourishing a small mop in the wooden tub that held the steaming dish water, Nell, likewise arrayed, was laughing and vigorously rubbing a breakfast platter. Why should not the brown aprons always spend the hour after breakfast in the kitchen? And the hour before breakfast, also? Lulu was an excellent cake maker, her own bread was equal to Pauline's; she had learned to iron—but the washing! Her eyes grew doleful. But why

could not she and Lulu, with Chip to help about the water, sing the song of the suds together every Monday morning? Ever since Pauline went away the wheels of the household machinery had moved without a jar. What a difference twelve dollars a month would make in her scanty household purse? All the fall and winter she had been dressmaker and milliner for the family; she willingly asked her father for money for the family or to supply any personal need of the children, but not once since her mother's death had she made request for herself. Her mother had always taken thought for her; she felt as if she must choke if she asked her father for money for herself, and how she needed it her wardrobe bore ample testimony. She was glad that rubbers would conceal the condition of her shoes, and after drawing off her gloves to play in church, she held them in her hand hiding all their fingers from view. The money her father gave her was for the children, she morbidly reasoned, and would not spend one cent upon herself. If Miss Southernwood's Christmas gift had not been letter paper, stamps and envelopes, she wondered how she could ever have kept up her correspondence. Her father was grinding them all down

to the barest necessities to save money; not at the table, however, that must be well spread for Miss Southernwood's sake. What would they have done this winter without Miss Southernwood?

Chip growled because he had to wear his old overcoat, short in the back and *very* short in the sleeves, and Lulu often looked worried, and the twins did not understand the pressure at all. For the first time Christmas had come with no money to spend for Christmas gifts; Miss Southernwood was the only one in the house who had made Christmas presents. The twins had cried themselves to sleep Christmas eve, Lulu had wiped away a few tears, and poor little Bek, who felt every responsibility her own, had wondered if she might not have persuaded their father to give them something to keep holiday time with if she had been more persistent. But it was so hard to persist when he refused so decidedly and with so much irritation. Chip had muttered "stingy" both openly and under his breath, until a long talk with his father had silenced him and brought a look of anxiety to his clear boyish face.

"Dear old Chip," Bek had thought watching him afterward.

But it must be good for them to bear the yoke

in their youth, only they were apt to be restive under it.

"Girls! children," she began, after regarding them for a moment or two, "listen! I have a plan."

"Oh, good!" cried Floy.

"Tell us quick," cried Nell.

"Work or play?" questioned Lulu brandishing her broom.

"Plenty of both. Suppose we let Pauline stay with her sister."

"Pauline! *Stay?*" echoed Floy.

"And we all become Paulines," suggested Lulu, dismally.

"Oh, dear," cried Nell, who hated washing dishes.

"Oh, dear *me!*" cried Floy, who hated setting the table.

"Oh, dear all of us," cried Lulu with a comical groan, looking down at her pretty fingers. "When shall I ever find time to write my history of all the ages?"

"And when can we study?" asked Floy.

"Or practice?" continued Nell.

"And how can I peel potatoes and write poetry?" queried Lulu.

"You needn't—at the same instant," laughed Bek. "I like to peel potatoes."

"I know it, you selfish old thing," laughed Lulu, to hide the tremor in her voice. "You *like* to do everything, and you will always be sending us off. I won't agree unless you will give me every other week—taking turns as house-keeper!"

"I certainly will," promised Bek, "for your sake as well as mine. You may cook 'Common Sense' all through if you will only be economical."

"Have we *got* to let her go?" inquired Nell, earnestly. "She has always said she would stay until the last of us got married, and then she would go with you."

"Did she think I'd be the one to be left?" asked Bek, lightly, with a little shiver at her heart, however. "Give your vote. Do you all agree to my plan? We will be as regular as clock-work and as systematic as the solar system; not a jar, nor a jolt in all our smooth running machinery. Plenty of work and plenty of study and fun!"

"I agree," said Lulu, promptly. "I know it must be necessary or you would not suggest it."

"I'm getting tired of having her gone already."

sighed Nell. "Floy and I were saying this morning how soon she'd be home."

"I'm willing," announced Floy, bravely.

"I'll do the best I can," still sighed Nell.

"So will I," promised Floy, slightly doleful.

"Must we do all the work and *never* have anything new?" questioned Nell.

"When Fanny Green's father died they had to sell the farm," said Floy. "I don't mind getting poor a little bit if we may only keep the farm. I don't know what I *should* do, though, if we had to go away from here. Mother said she hoped we would never go away."

Lulu glanced at Bek. Chip never could keep a secret from Lulu.

"Poor father," said Lulu, the quick tears springing to her eyes.

"We'll all keep sunshiny whatever we have to do," said Bek, cheerily, "for father's sake and—for mother's."

"Chip will make the kitchen fire," planned Lulu, "and churn and help us on Mondays."

"Will father give us the money, though?" asked Nell.

"If he can spare it," said Bek, hopefully. "I'll talk to him about it."

"How shall we divide it?" asked practical Nell.

"I know," suggested Floy. "Bek and Lulu four dollars each, that's eight, and you and I two, that's four, and eight and four make twelve."

"But Chip," remembered Lulu. "For the churning and the fire and helping Monday!" said Lulu. "Yes, he must have something."

"I'll arrange it with him," decided Bek. "Thank you all for your cheerful co-operation."

"I'm not quite cheerful," confessed Nell.

Bek finished making her pudding and then wrapping herself in Lulu's blue and green shawl went out to the barn in search of her father. Pausing in the barnyard a low sound as of a groan reached her; in an instant it had taken the form of words:

"O Lord, send us help, for Thy mercy's sake."

How her heart echoed her father's prayer! Silently she retraced her steps; an hour later her father entered the sitting-room where she sat mending a rent in Floy's plaid afternoon dress. Floy was Bek's twin; Lulu had always owned Nell. He sat down beside her, taking up a newspaper, and then dropped it to look at her.

"Father, I have a plan to help you a little," she began hurriedly.

"Well," he responded, gloomily.

He brightened considerably as she unfolded it and patted her hand as he used to pat her mother's.

"You are a good girl, Bekie—but you mustn't be too sure of having the twelve dollars a month! I owe Pauline a hundred dollars!"

"Oh, do you?" exclaimed Bek. "Oh what shall we do?"

"I'll pay her or give her my note—tell her that when she comes back."

"I'll write to her first—she would talk about mother and cry and I could not bear that. Father, can't you mortgage the farm and keep it awhile longer?" she asked, earnestly, nervously pricking her finger as she thrust the needle into her work.

"That would only be putting off the evil day," he replied, thoughtfully.

"But we can work and do without, and save the interest, and take a few boarders next summer, and keep the evil day off until the twins are older and able to do something to help themselves; after a little while Lulu could be housekeeper and I could find something to do; it will be easier to bear when we can all help along—and we *might* pay off the mortgage!"

"Never," he exclaimed, emphatically, "not with our expenses."

"But will you think about it?" she asked anxiously, "can't you get the money?"

"I don't know where."

"Is it a great deal?"

"It is a great deal for me to earn with my hands on this farm."

"How much is it?"

"Over five thousand dollars."

"That is a great deal—when it takes one's home away."

"I trusted that man as though he had been my brother—it's the first time I ever went security for anybody; don't it say something about it in the Bible?"

"I hope so," said Bek, "but will you think about the mortgage?"

"I have thought of it and decided not to do it. I could not sleep with a mortgage held over my head; it will be sure to foreclose."

"Perhaps not. It would depend upon who held it. Somebody may be glad to have five thousand dollars in such a safe bank. The farm is certainly worth twice that amount; they would be fully secured. We would not be wronging any

one and we will pay the interest regularly even if we do without the necessities of life."

"Don't worry, child, you shall not do without too much."

"Oh, I don't mind, but the girls can't help minding. You do not owe any one beside Pauline?"

"Not more than I can pay by selling off corn and hay! That is a good thought about taking a few boarders. It will not make much more work for you, and you could keep the house running and dress the children and yourself—Bek, child, don't forget yourself. You don't look as nice on Sundays as you used to. What's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing," answered Bek, coloring and speaking with effort, "but you know the girls are growing older and I want them to look well."

"Of course," he answered, carelessly, "make yourselves look as neatly as you can, but don't spend too much. And I'll think about the mortgage again, but I don't know where to turn! Can't you suggest some one?"

"Mr. Reynolds!"

"I've seen him. His money is well invested, he doesn't want to make a change."

"Mrs. Harris."

"She'd foreclose five minutes before the time if she could."

Bek thought of Mr. Prentiss; he was reported to have money, but how could they apply to him?

"Don't people ever get money out of the bank?" she timidly suggested.

He laughed and springing to his feet stood looking down into the perplexed face.

"What a sharp little business woman she is! Don't hold a bank over my head! Wouldn't you sleep better in a house all our own? Confess!"

"If I were the only one that had to sleep in it," she confessed, smiling, "but the children love this place so—and mother loved it, and who knows but that we can get it back some day? If it passes out of our hands how could we get it back?"

"I've been offered ten thousand for this."

"Only ten thousand," she repeated.

"It isn't a large farm, child."

"Did that include the stock and other personal property?"

"Of course not; we want something in our new home."

"But the house is large—"

"I have thought," he interrupted, "of taking all I could scrape together after the sale and going into the grocery business with Fairbanks; we'll take Chip in, too; wouldn't you like to live in Cumberland?"

"But if you should fail what would we have left?" she asked quickly.

"I'd have my two hands," he answered, grimly.

"I like Murphy's better than that. There's no anxiety connected with Murphy's! It will be only homesickness. And if we have each other and are not in debt we can soon make it like home. And the children will learn not to mind. Father, I know you will do what is wisest and best," she said looking up with faith in her eyes.

"Even the grocery business," he said smiling.

"No; you will not do that," she answered, confidently, "and I'll try and prepare the twins."

"Not yet; I'll think about the mortgage again. I confess I don't know where to turn, and there's so little time now. The money has *got* to be used or it might be arranged. Don't fret about it, child. My children are all helpers and comforters. You are my child, too, you must remember."

He stooped to kiss her with the rare tears in his eyes.

"Your mother was my blessing and you are just like her."

Who would not be happy after that? That afternoon she filled a sheet of foolscap to faithful Pauline. Pauline received the letter two days later and slept that night with it tucked under her pillow.

"They'll send for me, dear things, as soon as they get tired out," she said as she fed her sister with beef tea, "and you want me just now, anyway. Miss Bek takes to kitchen-work naturally, but the others don't covet it. It will take more than four of them to do my work, they'll find out. There's plenty to do in that house beside kitchen-work and I'll go back to them if I have to do all the work and pay my board besides. I've got fifteen hundred dollars saved up, so I can afford to work for nothing."

## XVII.

### WRITTEN FROM ROME.

“Heaven is never deaf, but when man’s heart is dumb.”

QUARLES.

“O, Miss Southernwood.”

It was the very tone in which Bek used to cry, “O, mamma,” or “O, mother.”

Miss Southernwood’s mother-heart gave a bound; what did the name matter after all? If “Miss Southernwood” meant “mother,” why would it not do as well? It was really a sigh and Bek did not often sigh.

“Well, child.”

The reply was like her mother’s too.

They were before the school-room fire. Bek was kneeling on the hassock and resting her head against Miss Southernwood’s shoulder; Miss Southernwood was leaning back in the spring rocker.

“There’s something I want to know and I can’t know it; I can’t see one step ahead.”

"Perhaps there isn't any next step."

"Oh, there must be!" said Bek hopefully.

"Perhaps you have come to the end."

"Oh, I know I haven't," she said confidently.

"Then you *do* know something it seems."

"Yes," she admitted.

Bek needed no questioning; she was never at a loss for words.

"There's no one to tell me anything about it," she continued after a long silence.

"That is a strange thing; the strangest that has happened since God to Adam."

"But He doesn't always speak."

"Then He keeps silent and that silence has a voice; it says, 'Wait, don't pry into things.'"

Bek laughed somewhat nervously; that did seem like what she was trying to do.

"I know enough to be kept in suspense, enough to worry me, but not enough to rest me."

"Then, I suppose, it must be right for you to worry."

"Oh, Miss Southernwood, how practical you are!"

"I thought you wanted something real."

"It is so hard to wait for an uncertainty."

"The will of God is always a certainty. You cannot be waiting for that."

"Oh, I *am*," she cried earnestly, "I'm sure I don't want anything else. If it were to be patient or gentle, or to have my sins forgiven, I could find a sure promise, but it is not like that; it is something selfish, all for myself, and yet it is not— It will make a great difference to several people."

"Does your suspense make a great difference to several people?"

"No: only to myself! But, oh, it does make a great difference to me."

"I suppose you pray about it."

"I'm almost afraid I pray too much about it; I'm afraid I *worry* before the Lord. I wish I hadn't had to know anything about it."

"Then you would miss something to pray about; something to have faith about, and that would be a loss in itself."

"I don't understand the difference—I can't understand the difference between delay in answer to prayer, and denial."

Pencil and paper were always at hand; Miss Southernwood slowly traced a tall capital "N."

"What am I writing?"

"I can't tell yet."

"Why?"

"Because it isn't finished."

"How do you know it isn't finished?"

"Because—" her eyes brightening, "you keep your hand on."

"Is there any way for you to decide what it will be?"

"I'll watch your hand," said Bek in a reverent tone, thinking of the Hand that she was watching.

"Suppose I do not move my fingers but keep the pencil on 'o.'"

"Then I cannot tell until you do move."

"And it may be 'no,' or it may be any word of which that may be a prefix."

"If it isn't 'no,' it may run on to *not—yet*. Oh, now I see!"

"You see, dear," Miss Southernwood tossed the bit of paper into the fire, "if God keep His pencil on a long time we are impatient and cry out that we do not understand. How do you know that He wishes you to understand anything except that you do not understand? He exacts many things of us, but foreknowledge is not one of them. You do not know many

words that I might have written, so we can think of but two or three ways to answer prayer. No miracle in mathematics can count all the answers His wisdom might plan to give. If He keep His happenings at a standstill why should it not be to keep us ignorant? Who asks you know the difference between delay and denial. He holds our fortune among His mysteries, but He is not a fortune-teller to reveal to-morrow just because we cannot understand to-day."

"But if I am denied I want to know it, and not go on hoping and praying. I am only adding to my own disappointment."

"Be sure you don't do that! If you think God *must* give what you want, and revel in it and build castles about it, and do not await His will before you plan your own plans, you are surely heaping up a disappointment for yourself. But God will deal kindly with you, anyway."

"I know that."

"If you do not waver in your asking His grace is being sufficient for you, and that is one answer in itself. Once Paul didn't know, you remember, and how he prayed and prayed and kept on praying. If he could attain to the knowledge that

his long delay was not denial, why may not we? 'Oftentimes I purposed,' he writes, 'but was let hitherto.' Why did he not take his repeated hindrances as a denial? Perhaps there was no hindrance that time, and perseverance could not overcome."

"Mine has nothing to do with time and perseverance," said Bek.

"His latest prayer seems as joyfully sure and earnest as the first. It may be that he reasoned that if God intended to disappoint him He would not add to his disappointment by awakening the intense desire that long praying ever creates. He cared a thousand times more to go to Rome than if he had never prayed unceasingly that he might go. If we are to exist as long as God exists we have as long a time to wait as He has to keep us waiting. Our patience is eternal, also. 'The greatest prayer is patience,' is one of Buddha's sayings."

"I'm not patient," sighed intense Bek, "it is something I want to be and do, some time, not now, oh, not now, for anything—"

"Then I can't see where the suspense is—I can't see where it is, for I have not travelled 'so far inland'—but—"

"It is a little hope, such a little hope; and I'm ashamed that I do hope at all—and I may have no reason to, but it is such a perfect thing."

"I never yet had an experience that I could not find something among the things written aforetime to fit it; something that stood for it. Is your Bible on your desk?"

"Aurora Leigh" was on the desk, and Tennyson, but the Bible was there also, and her precious "Daily Food." The journal—a marred and much perused thick book—was inside the desk. She had come to the time in her life when she could not give all of herself to its confidential pages; never before had she written so meagrely of her inner life. It was not because the real life was less intense. She had got to the experience when words were not sufficiently expressive; there were a few incisive sentences, nevertheless, that cut sharp all the way through.

She brought her Bible, wondering where Miss Southernwood would find any word to meet her present emergency. With an absorbed face Miss Southernwood turned the leaves, and bending over in the firelight Bek read the words, the few words her finger indicated:—"Written from Rome."

She read the words aloud disappointedly, dwelling on each syllable

"They are not among the inspired words, only something added by somebody to one of Paul's letters."

"It contains a fact, however; one of God's facts. Paul did write a letter from Rome."

"But I thought it would be a promise," still with the disappointment in her voice.

"That's all. It is all in those words."

"I can't see anything in those words," not rebelliously or willfully. "But it is only a dry fact; as if I should say, 'Written from Clovernook.'"

"When I say 'Written from Clovernook' it means a great deal," said Miss Southernwood.

"I have looked all through the Bible for help, but in a whole lifetime I should never think of taking any comfort from that."

"The words mean nothing to you, then." Miss Southernwood shut the book and leaned back, Bek's head came again to its resting-place.

"Oh, how much they meant to Paul. He had written a letter from Rome at *last*! No one could know how long, how sore, and how sweet, too, was that at last! You have not been waiting so very long?"

"No—o—only since last summer!" replied Bek, flushing and hiding her face a little.

"Paul had planned and hoped and prayed—how long do you think? Six months?"

"A year, perhaps."

"Paul's plan was not for his own sake, but for Christ's sake."

"I think mine is—a little—for His sake," said Bek, thinking how her mother had hoped to work in the Clovernook church for His sake. "It is for work that I love—it is not all selfishness—I might have thought of the work, I know I should, but I should not have thought of this way of doing it but for something—and of something mother said, beside; so I can't help hoping and praying. And not knowing something that I shall know by and by keeps me unsettled. Sometimes I wonder why God let me know a little and not all."

"To try your faith and to make you ready for that or something else. God makes us ready to go west sometimes by sending us east. It is never safe to think we know God's plan."

"Isn't it?" asked Bek, gravely. "I have been thinking that I did know."

"Don't think so any longer. He is glad for

us to plan when we plan for Christ's sake, but He may upset our plans all the same."

"Did He upset Paul's plan?"

"Not really—but He kept him waiting and gave him faith to keep on hoping. Twenty-five years after Jesus met him in the way He came to him in the night and comforted him about his heart's desire."

"I should give up long before twenty-five years!"

"Not if the hope came from God. I am not afraid, you will hold on as long as Paul did if God keep you holding on. When Jesus came that time in the night He promised him that he should go to Rome."

"Oh, how good," cried Bek, impulsively.

"Good that he might have his heart's desire! Not good that the Lord came to speak to him? I'm afraid you are thinking more of your heart's desire than you are of Him."

"I'm afraid so, too," Bek acknowledged. "If He should enter this room now I should want to fall at His feet and ask Him to let me do what I want to do, and not think, at first, to thank Him for forgiving my sins, or for being so good as to come to speak to me. Oh, how

wrong I am!" she sighed. "I don't believe anybody was ever so wicked before. The other day when Mr. Dunraven was talking about the second coming of Christ, do you know what I was thinking? I hardly dare tell you. I was thinking that I did not want Him to come until I have time to live out some of my plans. I am so self-willed! And I have believed that I wanted no way but His way."

"Poor child! dear child," comforted her friend, "I have travelled your way, I know all about it. I feel almost sure that God will take pains to teach you that His way is best."

"I'm willing," Bek almost sobbed.

"There's nothing like an obedient to-day to reveal God's will to-morrow. Paul was kept two years in prison after Jesus told him that he might go to Rome."

How little her six months began to seem!

"About that time Paul wrote a letter to Rome, speaking thus strongly of his burning desire to see them: 'Without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers.' It is good to send prayers ahead to make way for our reception and our work: 'Making request,' he writes, 'if, by any means, now, at length, I might have a

prosperous journey by the will of God to come to you.' He says: 'Oftentimes I purposed to come to you.' Remember the *oftentimes*. And then he was sent in a ship with other prisoners: 'And when we had sailed slowly many days,' writes the historian. That is what you do not like: sailing slowly many days."

"After he was fairly on the way, too," exclaimed Bek.

"As if he had not been on the way all the time! All this waiting, working, hoping, praying time! God was not in a hurry even if Paul were. And you remember he was shipwrecked and passed three months on an island after all that time of sailing slowly, of being imprisoned and of having to testify at Jerusalem. But he reached Rome at last; after a journey that was not prosperous as we count prosperity. And there in his own 'hired house' he wrote his letters from Rome!"

Both pairs of eyes were full. How many days of sailing slowly Bek would need before she might go to Rome. And then the Rome might not be the Rome she had chosen; not even the Rome she prayed unceasingly about. Miss Southernwood wrote her letters from Rome; the Rome where God had placed her, not in the Rome of

her old age that she had once dreamed and prayed about.

This pleasant home that Bek was praying that she might keep for the children's sake, was one of her heart's desires, but a stronger one, one that she thought of the last thing at night and the first thing in the morning, was the work, the love, the help that Mr. Prentiss' words to her mother had suggested; the blessed being "provided for" that had comforted her mother's last days. For how could God let her believe anything that was not true?

"God's plans like lilies pure and white unfold."

## XVIII.

### SHAKING UP.

“How shall we gauge the whole, who can only guess a part?”

“WHOM *do* you think has come?” shouted Floy, rushing into the school-room after silence had fallen between the two. “You *never can* guess! It’s Miss Prentiss! She just came in the stage. And she has a cold and she’s going to stay until it gets well.”

“Then I hope it will never get well,” laughed Bek, “this *is* a surprise.”

Every face around the tea-table was brightened, and they kept Janet talking unceasingly despite her hoarseness and frequent cough; the twins were interested in the little girls with scarlet fever; especially in the younger one who found the scissors and began to clip Janet’s beautiful hair early one morning, before she was awake, and who insisted upon giving her doll medicine by taking her head between her knees

and holding her nose, as Miss Prentiss had been compelled to force her own medicine down more than once when she had stoutly resisted; and how they all laughed at the remark of the little boy who insisted upon kneeling by the bedside to say his prayers.

"You can as well kneel in bed," Janet told him.

"I don't think that would be very *polite*," he replied.

"I thought you only went among poor people," said Floy.

"I have learned that the rich need care and nursing as well as the poor; I go wherever I am needed."

"I like that," said Mr. Maurice heartily.

"That's the way I shall do," commented Lulu.

"Lulu! what's the matter with your hair?" inquired her father. "You are changed and what is it?"

"I'm tired of being a little girl, that's all," she answered, seriously, "so I've braided my hair. I intend to do it always after this."

"It is certainly very becoming," said Janet.

It was braided and bound around her head, the curls escaping over her forehead somewhat in Bek's pretty fashion.

"You look three years older," declared her father.

"I'm glad of that," returned Lulu, contentedly. "I'm getting old enough to go with Janet."

"My brother John says you must not," said Janet, looking with admiring eyes upon the sweet, girlish face.

Middle-aged women love girls and Janet was almost middle-aged.

"That reminds me! I have two sheets of foolscap to read to you. He's becoming terribly unsettled, this brother of mine; speaks of making me a visit this spring and of taking in Clovernook."

"Oh, delightful," cried Lulu. "I have been salting down some questions to ask him."

Conscious Bek colored uncomfortably and hastened to sprinkle sugar over Bertie's bread and milk. It was a hard experience for the girl: this suspense about something that she never would have thought of for herself; only that she was the kind always to be ready for every new experience. Lulu was ready for the next thing to *do*. Bek was ready for the next thing to *be*. Lulu's world was everywhere; Bek's world was one that she created for herself. Lulu, therefore, was ready for usefulness; Bek was being made

ready. The girls had hardly made themselves to differ; Lulu, consciously had left herself in God's hands; Bek, unconsciously, had taken herself into her own hands. People who loved Lulu were shy with Bek. Miss Prentiss loved Lulu, but she was not shy with Bek.

Her brother had confided to her that he desired to make one of the sisters his wife; but he would not reveal his preference. She had decided instantly that it was Bek, with some misgiving, perhaps; Lulu seemed so perfectly fitted to his every mood and phase of feeling, and then—Bek might be a treasure as his wife, but, oh, what a rare worker Lulu might become in his parish. She had both the consecration and the *push*. But she did not tell him so; for how could he see with her eyes?

"I have some questions to ask him," said Janet, "I want a talk about money-matters. Mr. Ryerson is not satisfied with the investment of a few thousands of mine and counsels me to make a change. He counsels bond and mortgage; he wants me to take the first mortgage on some real estate that pays. Somebody's farm, for instance. But you farmers are all in too easy circumstances for that, Mr. Maurice?"

Bek's eyes met his.

Mr. Maurice set down his tea-cup deliberately; the flash in his eyes had answered Bek's.

"I was counting the mortgaged farms in our vicinity to-day, and it was appalling."

"I don't want anything to do with a mortgaged farm."

"No; you want to burden some poor fellow with a mortgage and worry the flesh off his bones to get your interest."

"It would certainly give me something to do when I get out of typhoid cases and the after care of surgical operations."

"It might be a surgical operation in itself," he answered lightly, "and you would be sure to sell him out to go to Europe with it or for a marriage portion."

"I might if I hadn't something beside. John and I have city property that will do that for us. You may represent me as merciful; I want nothing but the interest for the next twenty years—if I live; if I die, John's church is to have it. My heart is in that church."

"And yet you ran away from it," said Mr. Maurice.

"Yes, I knew John would never seek a wife

to help him as long as he had me, and I do approve of mothers for boys and wives for men."

"Is your plan working well?" inquired Mr. Maurice, laughing.

"You will see," she answered sagely.

Naughty Bertie kicked his boot off at that instant and Bek stooped to find it.

"You might tell us," coaxed Lulu. "I don't know of any one good enough and wise enough and lovely enough for him, do you?"

"She would learn to be with him," said Miss Southernwood intent upon her peach.

Mr. Maurice was unusually silent during the evening; he made a pretence of reading the newspaper, but Bek noticed that his eyes wandered from it continually.

"Mr. Ryerson came up with me in the stage," Miss Prentiss remarked to Miss Southernwood, "he will stay over Sunday at the Parsonage and I want him to see you; how shall I manage it?"

"I shall go to church."

"Yes, but I want you to talk to each other. He must return to his desk and high stool Monday morning—he's another Charles Lamb in his self-forgetfulness and in his love of literature—and I want him to sing some of the grand old

hymns with us. Mr. Maurice, may I bring him home from church to-morrow evening? He is one of those people who cannot intrude. I want the girls to see my hero."

"I am sorry you think you need ask me, Miss Janet," replied Mr. Maurice. "How could any friend of yours be unwelcome?"

"Thank you. He is a part of the Sunday quiet and Sunday rest. When I tell John that the ministry has lost a hard worker he always says that the laity hasn't, so I have to be content. I am always glad to say to my friends that I know a consecrated life that is not among the ministers. He fairly bubbles over with life and fun—but he is often too shy to give the best of himself. He is shy enough to be a genius; but he isn't, Lulu, he is as delightfully commonplace as my brother John. You have both seen him?"

"At church!" said Lulu. "He is tall and broad-shouldered, with eyes as blue as Bertie's and yellow hair and yellow moustache. He looks like Hengist and Horsa. He played one Sunday when Bek was not there and he came into Sunday school and took Bek's class. The superintendent asked him to address us, but he laughed and said, unlike most people, he could practice better than

he could preach. Bek doesn't think he's handsome. I'm so glad you'll bring more people into our world, Miss Janet. I never can know people enough, but I believe Bek would be content never to see another new face."

"I'm afraid I would," said Bek, "and it's bad in me."

"It *is* bad in you," replied Miss Southernwood energetically. "Janet, I'm thinking of sending Bek home with you. She needs shaking up."

"Mrs. Wilcox and the children would be only too happy. I am away so much that they make festivals of my days at home. And Mark would play for her all the evening long and read another evening long. Mrs. Wilcox is an invalid and the children are sometimes troublesomely human, but there is an atmosphere of rest about the house for all that."

"Who is Mark?" asked Lulu, "some big boy."

"Yes, he is very like a big boy. He is your Saxon king. Mark Ryerson's mother married the second time when he was a little boy—he and Norris were twins—and the children are Norris's orphan children. They live in an old house in the suburbs; when Mrs. Wilcox dies it goes to her husband's heirs. The only sister, Mary Wilcox,

is married in California and that's all the family history."

Mary Wilcox in California! She must be the one who sent her letter to New York! Oh, that letter! The blessing and the shame of it! But she could not run away from Mr. Ryerson; she must bear his eyes and talk to him and forget. It was such a little thing and so long ago, perhaps he had forgotten all about it already. But why must she be reminded of it? That was "at the first" and she had tried to do just right. One thing she knew: Janet and Miss Southernwood should not beguile her into meeting him every day. For how could she bear to be reminded every day of something that she was learning to forget?

She had wondered once if, in Heaven, the saints could forget all their hard times on earth; now she knew they did forget them, for even in the kingdom on the earth how many little hard times she had forgotten? Or, if remembered, they were remembered to be glad of.

## XIX.

### ONE SUNDAY.

“God writes straight on crooked lines.”—SPANISH PROVERB.

“WORK is not as precious as love; work for Christ is not always love to Christ.”

It was Sunday morning and Mr. Dunraven was speaking. These words were every word that Bek heard of the sermon; but they were enough to break her heart; to break the heart ready to break. The words she had spoken to Miss Southernwood with such quiet intensity, like a flash of light, had revealed her heart to her. She had said that if Christ should enter the room and stand before her and she should fall at His feet, her first thought would not be of Himself, but of herself, of some plan, some work of her own; and she knew only too well what plan and what work! She was ashamed, oh how she was ashamed, but it was a shame

that brought contrition. It was no marvel that in the rush of shame and penitence, in the eager prayer for forgiveness, she heard no more. Her heart was at His feet, now, not filled with herself; but filled with Himself. Her hopes—even this hope that had not come of itself, her plan, even this plan of her own, might crumble away and she be left with nothing to do of her own choosing, she would be satisfied. Love would be left, submission would be left. Very still and subdued she was all that day; but more joyful than she had ever been in her life. Could she be born again—twice?

Lulu told Miss Southernwood that Bek had an illumination in her eyes.

Had not Mr. Ryerson's name been mentioned in her presence that day she would have forgotten that he was to come at night and make her uncomfortable. He was not at Sunday school; she drew a breath of relief upon finding that the dreaded introduction was postponed, but the thought of it all came with full force when she overheard Miss Dunraven remark to some one that Mr. Ryerson had gone to condole with Dr. Prentiss. With considerable nervousness she looked forward to the evening and decided to

remain at home with Bertie, but this was overruled by Janet who was afraid of the night air.

"And Bertie likes me and my stories," she urged.

Bek flushed but did not demur. She was standing alone at the organ before service, touching the keys lightly with one hand, when she felt a presence beside her.

"We do not need any one to speak our names to each other."

She had never heard Mr. Ryerson's voice but this voice was like Janet's picture of him. She raised her eyes shyly: no words were at command; the kindly laughing eyes became grave instantly.

"I wonder if you will let me play for you to-night."

"Thank you; my fingers trembled for fear of you this morning. I wanted Lulu to play, but she laughed at me."

"That was wise. Where is Miss Janet to-night?"

"Staying with Bertie."

There was a choking in her throat and her fingers were cold. He seated himself at the organ and she turned away to speak to Miss

Dunraven. The illumination in her eyes was clouded.

"How did you find Julius, Mr. Ryerson?" inquired Miss Dunraven.

"Very penitent, very weak, full of high resolves, and determined to go off as soon as he is able."

"And Gertrude?"

The moved tenderness in his eyes was as much as Bek could bear. Her own tears started.

"Poor child," he said.

And that "poor child" might have been uttered for her!

"A wounded spirit, who can bear? I shall be surprised if she live three months," he added.

"She won't die!" said Miss Dunraven decidedly. "She will find something better to do. *She* says they will go to her mother's and her determination will win the battle. All that Julius needs is for some one to decide for him. He is one of those natures that need a father or a policeman to keep them in order."

Bek almost laughed aloud; if she had not laughed she would have burst into hysterical tears.

The illumination came back to her eyes during the sermon and a blessed hush fell upon her

spirit. To render the day more than ever one of remembrance she caught a word from her father as he grasped the minister's hand after the sermon:

"I thought I was too great a sinner to be saved, dominie, but I've begun to hope."

They crowded themselves into the roomy sleigh and glided over the snow, under the light of the stars a silent little company. The twins were the only ones who seemed to find any thing to say. Bek had found nothing to say, but she found enough to sing when Mr. Ryerson sat down at the piano. Miss Southernwood looked at Janet and smiled as Bek poured out her soul in the grand old hymns. She had had her "shaking up."

The fervor with which Mr. Maurice sang "Rock of Ages" touched them all. Floy asked for "Jerusalem the Golden," for mamma's sake.

"Miss Lulu!" said Mr. Ryerson, "you have the voice to move men's hearts and to sing children to sleep."

"Oh, have I?" she returned unaffectedly. "Perhaps that will help me find my vocation."

"Is that what you are seeking just now?"

"Yes; and I haven't a hint of what it is to

be. Bek's vocation is always the first thing she finds to do. If this house needed painting, she would begin to paint to-morrow as though she were born to do it. But I don't want to do everything; I want to do *something*."

"Like Janet?" he said smiling at Janet.

"Yes, but they won't let me," she answered ruefully.

The talk between Miss Southernwood and Mr. Ryerson was something to listen to. Mr. Maurice listened, nodding his appreciation once in a while, Lulu's cheeks were aflame and her eyes aglow as she interjected a question, or gave enthusiastic assent, Bek sat apart near her father, with the hush upon her spirit and the soft light in her eyes. Janet made a remark about a wonderful answer to prayer that had come within her experience and the twins begged her to tell the story.

"I have not seen the lady, but I have received several letters from her, and I can vouch for the truth of her story. She was very ill for years—three or four—and had many physicians; as she could not retain medicine the physicians began to inject morphine into her veins. She could not sit up at all; the doctor carried her from

one bed to another. A reclining chair was purchased for her, but she could not use it. She became helpless, the pain was so agonizing that she was forced to use morphine incessantly. By and by she began to hope that she might be healed in answer to prayer. Man's help had proved unavailing; she had no hope but in God. Friends came and prayed with her; she attempted to rise in bed, and then made an effort to take a few steps and found that to her faith it had become possible; she sat up half an hour and then walked back to her bed without assistance. She had been in the habit of using morphine five or six times during the twenty-four hours and the physicians declared she would die without it. She gave it up entirely, grew stronger by the day, and now walks half a mile to church. She has visited a friend of mine who is also being healed by faith."

"Oh, how wonderful!" exclaimed Nell.

"How splendid," cried Floy.

"Is that all you know?" asked Lulu.

"No, indeed. Sometime I'll show you letters from several friends who believe that Christ is on the earth to-day as truly as He was on the earth eighteen hundred years ago."

Nell's face flushed; Floy's eyes filled with tears.

After a little while Mr. Maurice excused himself and went out to the dining-room fire to read his wife's Bible, the twins said good-night, Janet disappeared and Lulu followed; Bek lingered, listening from her sofa corner.

"Miss Southernwood! How unconventional we have been!" Mr. Ryerson exclaimed. "You have been talking to me as though I were one of your girls instead of a broad-shouldered, moustached fellow."

"It's queer about that," laughed Miss Southernwood, "but I have learned that moustaches and frizzes and crimps are not so unlike in their needs and longings; here you are, with your experience of life, your knowledge of men, your aspirations after great things—and here is little Bek with her inexperience of life, her ignorance of men, and her aspiration after what you might call small things, both asking the same questions."

"And we shall both solve this puzzling problem, our own life, in the same way," he returned.

"I hope you will," said Miss Southernwood in her sweet, wise voice.

"Miss Bek, what is your puzzle now?" he asked,

appealing to the dark green figure in the sofa corner.

"My puzzle is," she answered slowly, "whether God ever lets us believe a thing that is not true, believe it and thank Him for it."

"That is not a puzzle to me," he said quickly, "that was solved for me once."

"Oh, do you know?" she questioned eagerly.

"Yes, I know. I believed once that He had surely given me a thing that I wanted as men sometimes want but once in a lifetime, and I took courage and thanked Him. And He gave it to some one else."

There was no bitterness, no hardness, no disappointment in his tone. Bek could scarcely believe it; there must be some mistake.

"And then?"

"And then—" he repeated.

"But He let you thank Him," she said, unconvinced, "and He knew He had not given it to you."

"Yes."

"That seems—hard."

"So it does."

"*Was* it hard?"

"Very hard, at first."

"I cannot understand," she said, with her usual little frown.

"Neither can I."

"Hasn't He given you anything better?"

"Not yet."

"Then you do not know why it was."

"No."

"Perhaps you will know some time."

"Perhaps I may never know. I am willing to wait until I do know. Somehow I never care to know why God does such things: I am sure it is all right. I don't care to know why it is all right. I do not sympathize with people who are anxious to discover God's whys and wherefores."

"You have learned that you would have been miserable with it—that means less happy than with something else; but you do not know why God let you believe that He had given it to you and why He let you believe enough to thank Him."

"If I believed it at all I had to thank Him," he answered simply.

"But He let you believe."

"Yes; and I do not even care to know why."

"I shall care to know why," she said seriously.

"Perhaps you would not understand if He should make it plain," he returned.

"No—" she hesitated, "but I do begin to understand why you had such an experience."

"Why?"

"That you might help me. Perhaps that is all the reason—that you may assure some one else that no strange thing has befallen them."

"That is worth while then. I have told you something that I never have revealed to any one else."

"Perhaps no one else needs it."

"Miss Southernwood, do you?" he asked with a laughing light in his eyes.

"No," she said gravely, "I have lived longer than you both and in that experience you are beyond me."

It was an experience, Bek knew. And now—and now that might not be true, this thing she was hoping for; the believing it and giving thanks for it did not prove it true. For the second time Mr. Ryerson had been her helper.

"Mr. Ryerson," she began bravely, but with her own consciousness it was not easy to finish, "do you—do you expect to see the rest of it?"

"To have something that I believe He has given me and that I have thanked Him for? I most assuredly do. And something better than that other thing."

"Not better in itself, it may be, but better for you," added Miss Southernwood.

Lulu had flitted in and was standing leaning over Bek's sofa arm.

"Oh, you mystical, mystical people," she laughed.

"Mr. Ryerson, I like the way you take life," said Bek.

"So do I," he returned, teasingly. "I have a good deal to take."

Lulu said afterward: "Mr. Prentiss stands above you, but Mr. Ryerson stands beside you."

## XX.

### NOT TRUE, THEN.

“With God go over the sea—without Him, not over the threshold.”—RUSSIAN PROVERB.

BEK was in the kitchen bending over the stove making a stew for dinner; it was savory even if it was economical, and Janet and Miss Southernwood would not miss the roast because she had a delicious dessert; the queen of puddings.

Her cheeks were flushed with the heat of the stove and the moist locks on her forehead were curled like the rings of a baby's hair; there were two upright lines in the forehead concealed by the rings of hair, for, at this instant, she was counting how few weeks—almost how few days there were left for work in the dear, old kitchen.

“Oh, dear,” she sighed unconsciously, giving the stew a listless stir.

Another ejaculation, a triumphant one, greeted her as she crossed the kitchen.

"Well! Well! Well! Bek!"

"Sir," answered Bek, startled out of her reverie.

"I've done it! It's done! Or it will be as soon as the business can be settled. Miss Janet professes to be relieved to get the money into safe hands, and to-day you will eat your dinner on a mortgaged farm and to-night you will sleep under a mortgaged roof."

"I'm so glad!" Bek managed to say.

Her heart was beating wildly. Was the old home saved for awhile? And she need not tell the twins? Had the trouble passed by in the dark so that they need not know it? It was pleasant to have their home in Janet's hands if it must be in somebody's hands.

"Now, Bek, for hard work and saving," he cried jubilantly.

"I'm ready for both," said Bek.

"She wishes to board with us three months every summer; that will make the interest lighter."

"What a friend she is!"

"But not to her own detriment," returned Mr. Maurice, proudly, "I would not allow that. Her money is as safe as though it were in government bonds."

"Yes," assented Bek.

"Ryerson knew of my trouble; I have an idea he sent her here."

"He didn't give her the cold," laughed Bek, "and she promised mother she would always come here to be nursed."

"I *am* relieved!" he exclaimed, pacing the kitchen floor, "it was going through deep waters to me to lose this place. Now the question is how we are to pay off the mortgage. Chip and I can do all the work here, hiring occasionally when we are pressed. But we've got to save and to earn somehow."

"If we were four boys instead of four girls," said Bek, beginning to open a can of Pauline's tomatoes.

"Girls can do without if they can't earn," was the sententious reply.

Hard work and doing without! And a mortgaged farm! But she did not sigh. She enjoyed hard work, there was a sort of glory in the self-denial of doing without, and the mortgage—the precious old home was saved and in Janet's hands! They all had good health, good spirits and faith! The money would come from somewhere; the indefinite somewhere was God. The two little upright lines disappeared, light feet

tripped about the old kitchen floor, and when Floy ran down from the school-room to set the dinner table she found Bek ready for a two minutes' romp around the dining-room.

This was a continuance of good things; Bek hardly knew when the good things began; the best thing of all was that at the spring communion her father confessed his faith in Christ. It was like him to be zealous; immediately he became a worker in the church.

Mr. Prentiss took his vacation early that year; he spent the month of May at Clovernook. Janet grumbled about being brought into the country before July, but she yielded with a good grace and came to Beulah (as she had named the farm) three days after Mr. Prentiss took up his abode at the Parsonage. Mr. Dunraven submitted to be sent away, and Mr. Prentiss filled the pulpit during his absence. Gertrude Prentiss and her husband—his friends did not often say Julius and his wife—left Dr. Mason's early in the same month and settled down in Gertrude's home.

Mrs. Raymond died before the month ended; grandfather found a home with another daughter; and the farm, by right of inheritance, became Gertrude's. The house was old and very plainly

furnished, but the eighty acres were valuable; the farmer who had had charge of it since Mr. Raymond's death continued to reside in the little house upon the place and to do his work thoroughly, with due regard to his mistress's interest.

"I must look up a practice by and by," Dr. Prentiss observed often as he yawned over his novel. But the hammock, a novel and a daily drive to Cumberland became more and more his only occupations. The hammock and the novel, Gertrude learned to bear, but the daily drive became insupportable. All her remonstrances and entreaties were in vain; if she rebelled against his drive he would store his liquor away in the house, he threatened.

"I must have it," he urged, "it is not a new thing—although I have broken off a dozen times; I have drunk more or less since I was eighteen years old."

Her heart did not break; as Miss Dunraven had prophesied, she found something to do. What a month this home-coming was to her! And what a month this month of May was to the girls and Miss Southernwood at Beulah. A daily visit from Mr. Prentiss was a matter of course, and when the daily visit was in the morning, he supple-

mented it by a call in the evening. Lulu's questions were all answered and yet there ever remained more to be asked. He told his sister and Miss Southernwood that Lulu's part of the conversation consisted in telling him stories and asking him questions. And Bek's? Bek was changed this summer; the frank, free intercourse of last summer was shadowed by a reserve that was trying; she often asked him a question, but she seldom told him a story. She was herself, her easy, charming, unaffected, self-forgetful self to every one beside himself; she had new duties this summer, but it did not seem necessary that she should so persistently keep herself in the background. With Mr. Ryerson she was as much herself as she was with his sister or Miss Southernwood; was she disappointed in him? Her ideal of a Christian minister was very high; he must have fallen below her standard and yet—how she listened when he talked with others! It was incomprehensible, he would not question Janet; he was hurt and disappointed. Lulu was rare and radiant in every mood; he called her Lulukin and brought her flowers and books and took her to drive, but dignified little Bek was unapproachable.

"Bek admires Mr. Ryerson," said Lulu one day, "they seem to help and understand each other."

"Yes," he returned absently, "I think they do."

In his next sermon was a thought that Bek pondered long: "We need to be humbled, sometimes, before our prayers can be answered."

Three days afterward he went away; his vacation was ended. Bek was busy when he came to say good-bye, but he found her in the dining-room stoning raisins for Lulu's cake. Chip was bending over her, teasing her, and that may have brought unusual color to cheek and brow.

"I thank you for everything you have said and done," she said gratefully. "Janet and Lulu, and all of us, have so enjoyed your sermons."

"Is that all I am—a sermon?" he asked half laughing, "can't you separate me from my sermons and think of me—as I am?"

"I don't know how you are," she laughed confusedly, "I cannot separate you from your work."

"Do you always think of me in the pulpit?" he asked, startled.

"Oh, no, I've seen you go fishing, I've seen you holding the plough, I've seen you on horse-

back: I've seen you doing very commonplace things."

"And yet you only thank me for my sermons," he said disappointedly.

"Oh, yes," she said, with the old saucy sparkle, "I thank you for eating my bread and for bringing in coal to bake it with."

She was like herself now that he was going away.

"Janet is to drive me to the depot: I wish you might go too."

"I am housekeeper this week, and Mrs. Wilcox and the children and nurse are coming to-day."

"Is this hard work good for you?" he asked anxiously; "it seems to me there's a little dent in the roundness of your cheek that was not there a month ago."

"She's getting a dimple," interposed Chip.

"I'll laugh and sing it away," she said lightly.

"You are twenty-four this summer, aren't you?" he asked abruptly.

"Just twenty-four in June," she said with wonder in her eyes.

"I am coming again next June. I want you to learn a lesson this year. Learn how much money is worth and how little."

"I know how much it is worth," she said quickly. "I learned that all last winter when I was hoping to keep this home."

"And how little?"

"I know what it cannot do, I think, and yet, I do want it dreadfully."

"What for?"

"To buy our home back again and give it to father as long as he lives and then have it go to the children," she said, controlling her voice with an effort.

"And for yourself?"

"Why, *I'm here*," she said in surprise.

"And content to remain here, forever?"

"Of course," resisted Chip, stoutly; "don't put ideas into her head, she doesn't want to go on a mission, like Lulu."

Bek laughed and considered her raisins. Her fingers were certainly too sticky to shake hands.

"What else would you do with money?" he persisted.

"After the farm was ours again? The twins are to go to Rutledge Felix and Lulu does want to travel."

"What do you want to do most?"

"Just now finish these raisins and then make

Mrs. Wilcox's chamber a very bower of beauty. My tastes are not elevated, you see."

"I see."

"If it were not for my music and reading with Miss Southernwood I should grow rusty and antiquated," she declared with emphasis.

"And your Foreign Mission Band and your Debating Club! And you are to have three pupils in music, Janet tells me."

"Isn't that grand?"

"And no more hard work on Monday morning," he said.

"The washing! Who told you? Lulu was real brave, but it is hard for her. Yes, no more washing and ironing. To think I dare mention washing and ironing to you!"

"I shall go away comforted because you can and have. It is something to remember."

Bek wondered and cut a raisin in two.

"Give me a raisin and I'll go."

She laid a bunch in his hand, he lingered one second and turned away without a word of parting.

Bek finished the raisins with dimmed eyes.

It was not true, then, this thing she had thanked God for. Lulu was laughing at the gate and the twins and Bertie were shouting good-bye.

He would come again next summer and she would be twenty-five. He would come again every summer as long as Janet came. Perhaps until Lulu had gone on her mission and the twins were grown up and she was as old as Janet or—Miss Southernwood.

“Ah, me!” she sighed, and then wondered what there was in all the world for her to sigh about.

“Oh, dear,” exclaimed Lulu, after a silent moment of watching Bek and her raisins, “there are plenty of things in life beside ‘roses and lilies and daffa-down-dillies.’”

Janet and her brother rode certainly one mile before either spoke, at last Janet, who could bear it no longer, laid her hand on his.

“Haven’t you anything to tell me, John?”

“No,” he answered gently.

“Because there’s nothing to tell?” she questioned.

“Isn’t that the best reason in the world?”

“I thought there would be something to tell.”

“Perhaps there is—I suppose there always is, but I do not know how to tell it.”

“I thought, at first, it was Bek who was to take my place and my work, but I see it is Lulu.”

"How do you see that?" he asked, sharply.

"With my eyes. You and Bek have not had one good, soul-stirring talk this whole month."

"Well!" he replied, with some irritation.

"And she dearly loves such talks."

"Well," he said again.

"It isn't her fault, I am sure; you have scarcely noticed her."

"She has withdrawn herself from me; she has given herself to every one else. She is absorbed in those children, saturated with them. There was no one to entertain me but yourself, and Miss Southernwood and Lulu. Bek was invisible usually or only appearing at intervals and then she had something to attend to. Lulu rested me."

"And do you go home rested?"

"I am going home to work harder than ever. For a week something has been running through my mind. I almost repeated it to Bek; I believe I would have done it if that Chip had not been around with his nonsense. It is an old favorite of yours:

"'I'll go and work the harder, Lord,  
And wait till by some loud, clear word,  
Thou call'st me to Thy loved feet  
To take this thing, so dear, so sweet.'"

Janet said no more. She had not the guiding of these two human lives; the work of giving love to these two human hearts.

They would both "work the harder," there was no doubt of that.

And she was sure, now, at last, that it was Bek. But Bek? She could not be sure of what Bek was thinking.

## XXI.

### A SUMMER AND A WINTER.

“Praising God with sweetest looks.”

THE doves did return; in June the old mournful cadences floated across the fields. They startled the tears into Bek's eyes; that was all. The sunshine and the showers were just the same; happy voices, low and loud, sounded in the cool, wide nursery, and there was music all day long; for Lulu had promised Mr. Ryerson that she would practice four hours a day, the twins had their regular time for practicing, and it had been arranged that the eldest of Mr. Ryerson's nieces should practice when Lulu could attend to her. Such a din as there was in the house all that summer! It was a small world all by itself; a little world where Christ governed and His servants served Him.

Floy dismally counted fourteen dinner plates

for the first course and when Mr. Ryerson came every Saturday night, as he fell into a friendly fashion of doing, she was sure that counted one more.

Once in piling up the pile of plates, Bek had found her laughing, and to her question she replied:

“Oh, it was so appropriate! I didn’t know what I was singing and found it to be,

“ ‘When shall my labors have an end!’ ”

This was during July and August, when Janet was there also. There was Mrs. Ryerson, next to her father, the asthmatic, talkative old lady, who praised everybody and everything, and begged them all not to work too hard; and the invaluable Mary White, nurse and maid to the children, beside the three children, Sylvia, Fanny and Dorcas. And then there was Miss Southernwood and all of themselves. And then, very often in busy and hurried times, the table of the hired men in the kitchen.

Floy sighed outwardly and groaned inwardly; Nell lost her color and tried hard not to fret. Lulu was her radiant self all summer; she had found a part of her “mission” in music. Mr. Ryerson had

promised to teach her one year, "for love of music," and then find her pupils.

"Among my friends is a girl who has earned for herself a grand piano by teaching music and is to-day giving lessons, and she has been taking lessons at five dollars a lesson."

"Of you?" questioned Lulu, demurely.

"Yes," he returned just as demurely.

"I'll do all that yet," she said decidedly, "I will earn and Bek shall save. But I do hate to have Bek in the kitchen while I am at the piano."

"She doesn't hate it."

"Oh, no. She'd go out to service to help me in my music, I do believe."

"I know a lady who had a musical education at her mother's expense; her mother kept a laundry to support her daughter. And I was in a crowded horse-car when she said to her mother, because the shabby old woman recognized her: 'Madam, you have the advantage of me.'"

"I think she had," said Lulu.

Chip milked seven cows that summer and attended to the churning; Bek skimmed the pans, kept the dairy sweet, prepared butter for market and laid it down for winter use. She did wonder sometimes if people's right arms ever dropped *out*.

But the dairy was a cool, sweet room, with a stone floor, and it was oftentimes her sanctuary; the music of her favorite hymn,

“Saviour, more than life to me,”

was sung in the dairy oftener than anywhere else.

“Every day, every hour!” How she did live through every day, every hour of that summer. There were songs and prayers there as well as creaming milk and working butter; a bird sometimes came to the vine-shaded window and a squirrel often frisked about near its lattice.

Her letters to Mollie and Janet were half comical, half pathetic.

“I am not getting ready for any grand work,” she wrote once to Janet, “only doing what Pauline could do a dozen times better. I need just this experience; I need curbing, and humbling, and quieting down. I suppose we all dream. But I’m not dreaming now; I’m wide awake.”

It must be confessed that she had more than one “good crying spell” at night when all the house was asleep; she hardly knew for what and she hardly knew why she felt better afterward. A busy little figure, flitting hither and thither, with a happy face, with intent, almost intense

eyes when in a thoughtful mood, with a laugh that was praise and a voice that was a stimulant! A stranger would have observed nothing else and nothing different this summer; it was all that her father and the children saw. She was earning money and she was saving money, and she was not too tired or unhappy; he thought this every day watching her; for he did watch her when she did not see and love her more than she knew. Asking her if she were tired, he was always reassured by her quick, bright "No, indeed."

She never asked herself whether she were tired or not until she gathered Bertie in her arms at night that they might fall asleep together.

When Bertie repeated "If I should die before I wake," she did almost long to be in Heaven a little while before she awoke to another hard day; not to stay in Heaven; there was so much to be done down here first; so much that she was bidden to do. Once in a while she moaned: "O, mother! mother!" and more than once in a while she remembered, almost with a cry on her lips and hands outstretched, the friend whose words and presence had been inspiration all through that doubtful, happy month. But he had always been

with Lulu, it had seemed to be Lulu that he wanted in walks or drives or quiet talks, Lulu to whom he brought books, Lulu whom he asked to sing and play, Lulu to whom he looked when he spoke, Lulu, only, for whom he asked so often. "Where's Lulukin?" he never failed to say as soon as he missed her. And more than once he had assured Lulu that his sermon had been chosen for her.

As if his sermons had not been as much to her as to Lulu! Had not that first lecture-room talk taught her many things? Lulu had so much to be interested in! Sometimes, it almost seemed as if she were growing away from her! Growing away from her and growing above her! Her little sister, Lulu! Had not some of the summer boarders in Clovernook said that Miss Maurice was a brilliant girl, so much more noticeable than her elder sister who was said to be educated? Was it the kitchen and the moil and toil and the calculations that were spoiling her? Had she lost the "studential" air that Mollie used to laugh about? She had a way of keeping in the background to let Lulu talk; she had a way of buying pretty things for Lulu and brushing her old things anew. She had a way of being like Lulu's mother

instead of Lulu's sister. And she was almost twenty-five; she had almost turned the corner and nothing was settled, nothing had happened.

Lulu had said laughingly one day that Bek would be the old maid of them all. It was silly and childish to remember it; but it was like some of the stories of elder sisters; it might be glorious to give up everything to them all, but it wasn't comfortable. It would be hard, terribly hard, unbearably hard if—Mr. Prentiss should—marry—Lulu! The thought choked itself into words. But what a woman Lulu would be by and by, always rising higher and higher; and what was she herself grovelling into? It rained that day and the bread was not as light as usual and she had not saved as large a sum as she often saved out of the month's expenses and the month's income, and her head ached, and it was a luxury to be blue once in a while. But Floy was blue, too; she had been blue several days and no one had even thought of comforting her. Bek had noticed it, she noticed everything, but the time to speak to her had been hindered by many things. Had one been "The Memorials of a Quiet Life" that Bek had been snatching at odd minutes? Mr. Prentiss had brought it to Miss Southernwood and Bek had lost herself in it and

found herself thinking of Mr. Prentiss oftener than of the Hares. Somehow the book drew her towards him, rather brought him nearer to her, for his pencilled remarks were all through it. She had not lost herself in any book, as she had lost herself in this, since her mother went away.

She was alone in the sitting room "humoring" herself with it for "just half an hour by the clock" when Floy entered looking miserable. She glanced at Bek and was about to step carefully away when Bek glanced up the second time; but she did not see the little, miserable face, she was pondering the motto of one of the chapters: "Ah, if you knew what peace there is in an *accepted* sorrow."

Had she not accepted her sorrow? Her mother's death was her sorrow and—the other sorrow was only shadowing itself over her; she could not accept that yet, she could not know the peace of its acceptance yet. She must battle a little longer; defer looking it in the face; for, possibly, it might never be her sorrow. Lulu might think him too old, and learned, and grave; Lulu was such a child; but would she keep it from Lulu? Oh, what a tangle she was in, what a wretched tangle! The leaves fell apart as she held the

book, she brought herself back to the page: the corners of Floy's lips drooped and she moved nearer toward the door. She stood on the threshold of the kitchen and then looked back at Bek. But Bek saw nothing, Bek heard nothing, not even the soft, little, hopeless sigh. She had found her own thoughts in words. And, her heart quickened, there was the faint, rather timid tracing of a pencil. She heard Mr. Prentiss' voice as she read, she saw a dark, red flush that she knew in his forehead.

“ ‘What a union for two believers is a Christian marriage—to have one hope, one desire, one course of life, one service of God in common the one with the other! Both, like brother and sister, undivided in heart and flesh, or rather really two in one flesh, fall down together on their knees, they pray and fast together, they teach, they exhort, they bear one another mutually; they are together in the church of God, and in the supper of the Lord; they share with one another their grievances, their persecutions, and their joys: neither hides anything from the other; the sick are visited by them with pleasure, and the needy supported; psalms and hymns resound between them, and they mutually strive who shall best

praise their God. Christ is delighted to see and hear things like these. He sends His peace on such as these; where two are, there is He, and where He is evil comes not."

She flushed and felt ashamed. Had he thought of any one while he was reading it and emphasizing it by those faint, bold lines? Of Mame Dunraven, or Lulu, or that lady at home that he wrote to when he was at Clovernook and whom he called his good, right hand! *She* was not an insignificant little thing working so hard at home that there was no wider circle of helpfulness than her garden fence.

At that instant Lulu ran up the piazza, through the hall and into the sitting-room.

"Oh, Bek, guess who has written to me?"

She held an open letter in her hand, but she put it behind her and laughed.

"Why, I don't know!" said Bek, coming reluctantly back to the actual present. "Who should?"

"Somebody that should, but never would, before! Do be agreeable and guess."

"Mr. Prentiss!" guessed Floy promptly, the corners of her lips curving upward.

"You saw the envelope, and he does write a large hand."

"No, I didn't. Somebody asked me the other day if he wrote to you, and I said I supposed so!"

"I don't see why you supposed so! He never wrote to me before. He wants me to write a song for him to be sung in the Sunday-school on Autumn Leaf Sunday. As if I could! And Mr. Ryerson is to write the music. He can do that easily enough, but I never can write the song! Although I may have something that I can fix over. Can you think of anything, Bek?"

"No," said Bek.

She did not mean to be unsympathetic, but her voice was not sympathetic.

Lulu looked hurt.

"Why, Bek, don't you want me to do it?"

"Why, yes, dear!" in a changed tone. "I'll look over the poems I have copied, and help you find something; but I'd write something new if I were you."

"It will be printed! Just think! Won't it be too splendid? I know Mame Dunraven suggested it. Will you look now this minute?"

Lulu had not shown her the letter; it was a full sheet; did it take a full sheet to make this request?

"He has given me ideas," Lulu tossed her the letter, "and they are so pretty; all I have to do is to find rhyme and rhythm! That will be easy enough; but I'll look and see what I have first."

Floy's lips were discouraging again; would Bek never notice her?

"Psalms and hymns resound between them." Had she not just read that? And all Lulu thought of was the song she was to write. There was little in the letter beside the request and the "ideas." He had not even sent regards to her; he said he was writing in haste and he had ended with a scrawled "remember me to all." Lulu darted away, dangling her hat by one string and Bek heard her singing overhead. And he had needed help and had not thought of her! He had not thought of her simply because she could not help him. In all her life she had never made a rhyme worth anybody's reading, and as for anybody's singing! It was too funny: she smiled at the thought of it. But was there not anything in which she could help him? He had never asked her to do a single thing for him—beside playing and singing, of course—only—once, had he not really asked her to write to him? That was in the lecture-room near Rutledge

Felix, and she had answered so quickly without thinking anything. And how many things he had asked "Lulukin" to do. She had mended a rent in his duster last summer and even sewed buttons on his gloves. But when he needed help he never thought of her! There was nothing she could do but be glad that Lulu could help him and might help him. But she was not glad: she could not be glad; she was not even sure that she was willing.

All this time impatient Floy stood waiting; at last she came to Bek, and pushing the book aside crept into her lap.

"Well, little girl," said Bek, cheerily, "she wants some petting, does she?"

Floy looked grave and would not speak.

"Is something troubling you, dear?"

"Yes."

"Can't you tell me?"

"I don't know how," Floy half sobbed.

"Is it something you have done?"

"It's something I didn't do."

"Well, it isn't too late, is it? Jump up and do it now."

"I can't; it is too late, and I'm afraid to tell you; I'm afraid you'll be angry with me."

"Yes; you are dreadfully afraid of me! I should think you would be! I wouldn't ever tell if I were you; my anger will certainly be more than you can bear."

"You needn't laugh, it is something real."

"Then rid yourself of it as soon as you can. I wouldn't bear it another minute longer! Is that what you have been worried about?"

"Yes," with a burst of tears.

"Have you done something very wrong?"

"Not—wicked—but you won't like it. I was coming from the post-office, and I lost somehow—I never can think how—a letter directed to you; I went back and hunted everywhere, but I couldn't find it, and I've been out looking down the road every day since, and now it's too late; I know you'll never find it."

"Where was it from?"

"I don't know; I didn't look at the postmark, but it looked like—this." She stooped over and picked up Mr. Prentiss' envelope from the carpet.

"The envelope was large like this, and the 'Miss' looked just like this! And the County was down in one corner like this."

Bek did not speak; she did not know that her heart could beat like that.

"And I don't know what to do? Are you angry with me?"

"No, dear."

"But don't you want it?"

"Yes, I want it."

Oh, how she did want it!

"I didn't mean to be careless; I never lost a letter before. And I've prayed that I might find it, and I've prayed while I looked, but there doesn't seem to be any answer."

Would there be an answer if she prayed? wondered Bek. Was there anything else to do?

"What will you do about it?"

"I don't know."

"Don't you know what to do?"

"No."

"I thought you always knew."

"This is one of the times when I don't know."

"Perhaps Miss Southernwood will know, or Miss Janet," suggested Floy, hopefully.

"Have you told any one?"

"Only Nell."

"Don't tell any one, it isn't worth while."

"I wanted to write to Mr. Prentiss and ask him to write it over again, but Nell wouldn't

let me; she said if he *hadn't* written it, it would be funny, and she said you wouldn't like it."

"No; I shouldn't like it."

"Are you dreadfully sorry?" in a pitiful voice.

How little Floy knew what "dreadfully sorry" meant!

"Yes. I am sorry, but I do not blame you, dear. There's Dorcas calling. Run away and don't mind! It will all come out right."

Floy gave her a quick, glad kiss, and ran away to see what Dorcas wanted.

No; there was nothing to be done. And why should the letter be from him? Nevertheless she scarcely slept that night and did not sing about the house the next day.

The letter *was* from Mr. Prentiss and ran thus:

"MY DEAR FRIEND:—Janet writes me that you are working too hard and fears you will break down under your care. This knowledge hurries me into telling you a secret. I have, in trust, a sum of money for you; it was to be given to you on your birthday—your twenty-fifth birthday—but if in my judgment I deemed best to anticipate the time, I was left at liberty to do so. Therefore, if you choose, I can put you in

possession of one thousand dollars and then keep the rest of the secret until your birthday. Don't ask any questions, please. My will would be to give you the one thousand dollars to-day. Your life is of more worth to me than you can ever imagine. If you prefer strongly to wait until your birthday, I shall not seriously object.

“Yours ever,

“JOHN PRENTISS.”

But the letter was safe in the pocket of Floy's blue muslin; the day she had lost the letter had been one of the rarest of Indian summer days, that night it had become colder, and Floy innocently hung the dress away, saying to Nell that she did not believe she would wear it until next summer; and as it was almost too short now, perhaps Bek would give it away, and she might never wear it again.

“Then I won't wear mine either,” said Nell.

This very morning Bek had folded the two blue muslin dresses and laid them away in a long chest; she had taken a soiled handkerchief from the pocket of one of the dresses, and then it had not occurred to her to put her hand into the pocket of the other.

She had been learning the lesson he had set her to learn; she wondered greatly why he should have chosen a lesson about money; money's worth and money's worthlessness! Without money and without price the best things were to be had; but, oh, there were so many other things that money could do, that money could buy. It could buy Pauline back. It could give her time to read and study and practice; it could give them their home back again; it could send the twins to Rutledge Felix; it could give Chip a business education; it could educate Bertie; it could give Lulu years of musical advantages. But her first corner would come, notwithstanding money's worth or worthlessness! And money could not give the best things. It could not give her what she wanted most; it could not even find her letter. The Baroness Burdett-Coutts could not find that letter any more readily than she could! And if she were worth Queen Victoria's income, Mr. Prentiss would not have asked her to write a poem! The letter was not found, neither was it forgotten; suppose some one had told her that she had touched the outside of it! Perhaps we touch the outside of many of our blessings!

The old routine of breakfast, dinner and supper

all through the fall, as all through the summer. This was one of the summers that nothing happened. Lulu's music, however, was happening to her. The yellow head and the black head spent hours, at one time, over the piano. An enthusiastic teacher had found an enthusiastic pupil. Lulu's memory of that summer was all music. They sang the Autumn Leaf song together and each delighted in the work of the other.

"You could easily do mine," said Mr. Ryerson, "but I can never do yours."

"I didn't do mine," Lulu averred, "Mr. Prentiss did it."

November came, as November will, whether anything happens or not. And nothing kept on happening still.

The asthmatic old lady begged to remain through the winter, affirming that she had not breathed with so much comfort since she had left California.

"When the children grow up and can do for themselves I am going back there again to breathe."

The invaluable Mary White was dismissed, and grandma became the children's nurse; the school-room was made ready for three more pupils,

and Miss Southernwood had three more pupils to teach for love of teaching and for love of them.

Winter came again; a winter of hard work and doing without. Mr. Prentiss would not write to Bek to ask the reason of her silence; he supposed that she preferred to wait; perhaps she had other uses for the money than for spending it at home. Perhaps she did not reply because of that one sentence that wrote itself; it would escape him, he could not keep it back. Silence was not the best answer to give, but she had chosen to give it. Despite the presence of the children, despite Lulu's evident happiness, despite her increasing love for her father and appreciation of his many fine and lovable qualities, the winter was rather a dreary one to Bek. How she studied "Common Sense" that her dinners and breakfasts and suppers might be economical! How she pored over pattern-books that she might turn and twist and altogether renovate dresses for the twins! How she gave up, with no outward sign of reluctance, her own becoming crimson velvet turban to Lulu and told her how lovely she was in it! And how she decided to do without the money she had earned by her

music scholars that the dining-room might have a new carpet. Old Aunt Comfort would have said that she did the thing she wanted to do most: make home a blessing to the children. Taine's "English Literature" and the books that Miss Southernwood read were in no way powerful rivals to "Common Sense." The butcher's book and the grocery book were looked at every week, and each page scanned, the amount at the bottom of each page carefully considered, and the amount "brought forward" kept painfully in mind. The bills would be paid, of course; but paying bills was not saving towards the mortgage. The twin's winter suit, Chip's handsome overcoat, Lulu's becoming gray cloak, even baby Bertie's boots and pretty stockings were each pondered duly before purchased. Her own winter suit was re-made and re-trimmed, the old brown hat pressed into new fashion, kid gloves dispensed with and cheap shoes chosen. It was so *wearing* to be continually planning how to save money; the cares of this life came near choking the good seed that winter. She gave up drinking milk because the little Ryersons must have milk; she even wondered how it would do for her to take her tea and coffee without sugar and more than a few

times permitted the cake basket to pass by because seven slices a week would make——

She was alone before the dying embers of the school-room fire one evening in March when this original calculation struck her. Somehow she had dragged through the day, and she was resting before the fire simply because she was too weary to cross the hall to her own little bedroom where Bertie lay fast asleep.

Lulu pushed the door open and looked in.

“Bek!” she said shyly.

It was not like Lulu to be shy.

Bek said “Well” without raising her head. She was sitting on the rug with her head pillowed upon both arms in her mother’s rocker.

There was a shadow over Lulu’s face, her eyes were dropped; the shadow might be in her eyes. But it was not in her eyes; Bek was startled at the gladness in them as she raised her own listlessly.

“What has happened, child?”

“Nothing, something—everything,” replied Lulu, incoherently.

“You look so,” smiled Bek.

Lulu, the “child,” the child no longer, stood on the rug looking down into the dusky red

embers. All that she gave Bek was a nervous figure in navy blue and the back of her braided head.

"I've been trying to tell you," she burst out, "but I never could begin. I think mother will be glad, he is so good and so splendid, and I've been learning how to help him—are you glad, Bek?"

"Glad about what? Your music?"

Bek had not been listening. She was wondering if Lulu would need a new dress this spring; that navy blue was very becoming and so little worn. She sighed; she did not like to think about dress. She did not like to think about many things that she had to think about.

"Why, didn't you understand? Must I make it plainer, you unromantic sister?"

"Yes, please, I was thinking of something else."

"You always are nowadays. Mr. Ryerson is coming to-morrow night."

"He always does come twice a month," said Bek.

"But he was here last week," returned Lulu, consciously.

"So he was, I forgot."

"He is coming to talk to you and father," said Lulu stooping to poke one of the embers farther back.

"Especially for that! Oh, Lulu! You don't mean—"

"Yes, I do," laughed Lulu with a tremor in the laugh.

Lulu—her little sister! The sister younger than herself! How old she herself was growing!

With a laugh and a sob Lulu threw herself down on the rug beside her, and laid her head on the cushion of their mother's chair. They both felt as though their heads were in their mother's lap. It was a good place for Lulu to tell her glad news in; a good place for the elder sister to listen to such glad news.

"Do you *like* it?" questioned Lulu, hiding her face.

"I like him," said Bek, "and I like you, but I shall have to think before I know if I like *it*. O, Lulu, you are only a little girl yet."

"Nearly twenty," said Lulu, convincingly.

"Yes, you are; you are twenty the week that I am twenty-five. Lulu, it makes me feel old."

"Well, you *are* rather old," Lulu answered in

a matter-of-fact tone. "I think twenty-five is quite old."

"I used to think so—when I was twenty. I believe I think so to-night."

"I'm so sorry—I wanted to teach and help about the mortgage; it seems like leaving you behind—you and the others, but he says—you know his salary has been raised, it is two thousand now, and I *love* the children, and shan't mind them one bit, and grandma is so much better, and he doesn't want to wait. There doesn't seem anything to wait for particularly, does there?"

"Well, no,—or to get married for particularly either. He comes twice a month and grandma says she must stay here on account of her asthma," said Bek wilfully.

"Bek! That doesn't sound like you."

"Do I want to lose my little sister?"

"You will have the twins," said Lulu, in an injured tone.

"How long? They will be coming by and by and telling me they are twenty. Oh, what *do* girls get to be twenty for?"

"Bek, you think about nothing but that horrid mortgage."

"I do think of it too much," confessed Bek.

"That's wicked," said Lulu, wisely. "Mr. Ryerson says the cares of this world are as much of a snare as the riches of this world."

"I understand that! I don't deserve the riches, I'm letting the cares come between me—and other things."

"Will you tell father—prepare him?" Lulu coaxed.

"He would like it better coming from you."

"But I wouldn't like it better. I should choke. Suppose I let him guess."

"You didn't let me guess."

"I have tried to make you. But you wouldn't understand."

"I understand now," said Bek, lifting her head to kiss her little sister. "That is for mother and this is for me."

The kiss was not the only thing for herself; after Lulu went away she covered her face and—she was not brave to-night, little Bek with her many burdens; there were the mortgage and the children and the housekeeping and Lulu loving somebody better than her eldest sister and the missing somebody far away and the being so tired! And her cares were all creep-

ing into her prayers and staying there instead of being cast upon One that careth.

This was in March, in April came the heavy cold and the attack of pneumonia and other things. In May, one day, Miss Southernwood put a fly blister on her chest, and six hours afterward took it off and "dressed" it. That was the last thing Bek knew for six delirious weeks. All through those weeks she was away from home, travelling by land and sea, every adventure was full of terror; there was no one near to help or save, sometimes she shrieked in hysterics, sometimes sobbed, often prayed, not once did she recognize the faces or voices around her. They told her afterward that her eyes grew peaceful while Mr. Dunraven prayed, and that a gleam of pleasure would come when some one said "Janet."

"She must die," the physicians said.

"I'll feed her till the last," Janet declared resolutely and kept the beef-tea at her lips while Mr. Maurice and Miss Southernwood begged her to take it away.

"She is my patient," said Janet quietly and they desisted.

One day her eyes opened quietly and she looked

around and saw that she was at home. Three months from the day that she was taken ill she walked across her chamber without assistance.

"I've been away a long time," she said. "Tell me about the things that have happened!"

Floy drew her head down and whispered, "Mr. Prentiss *did* write that letter, but he says he'll tell you all about it."

## XXII.

### THINGS THAT HAPPENED.

“Faith can firmly trust Him in the darkest hour,  
For the key she holdeth to His love and power.”

“LET Bertie begin first,” said Lulu, “and we’ll all take our turns.”

“It will be a long story,” laughed Nell, “for *everything* has happened.”

“All the things that never happened before,” said Lulu.

“And they all happened without me,” Bek said musingly. Floy’s whisper had flooded her eyes with light.

“Yes,” declared Lulu, “you might as well have an easy time after this; the world kept spinning around and all things in it kept moving or kept stationary without a word of advice from you. Everybody’s cares and everybody’s riches have choked them just the same, and you, you dear old, busy, care-taking Bek, have neither helped

nor hindered. So, *won't* you have an easy time after this?"

"Yes," smiled Bek.

The Boston rocker with its gay chintz cushions was Bek's resting-place this July morning; she was wrapped in a shawl of white wool, its fleecy whiteness softened the thin face and brought out the tints of cheeks and lips; her hair fell over her shoulders in two long braids and the moist hair over her forehead curled more than ever in baby rings: the luminous gray eyes, the smiling lips, the weak, happy voice all told the same story,—gratitude and gladness. She had come back to them from the grave.

"Bertie," she said, drawing the child's head into her lap, "what did *you* do while Bek was sick?"

"I stayed down-stairs," he said mournfully.

"I think you *did!*" said Nell. "You were always running away upstairs."

"I wanted to see Bek," he said pleadingly. "She would not come down-stairs."

"Well, twinies, what did you do?"

"Enough," answered Floy; "but no matter what we did, Bek: we didn't do the happenings!"

The air stirred the muslin curtains—for Bek

was in the school-room, ferns and daisies filled the stone jar in the open fireplace. "Bob White" called out in the cradled wheat fields, and the scent of clover was wafted from some newly-mown hay field. The twins were hovering around the Boston rocker, Bertie was putting together his Sliced Birds on the carpet, Lulu was swaying to and fro in the spring rocker, the dancing light in her eyes subdued, and Janet was busily mending a long rent in Sylvia's blue muslin.

"Who did the happenings?" queried Bek.

"I wonder who does," asked Floy.

"I think Mary Wilcox had something to do with some of them," Janet decided, looking with satisfaction upon her neat handiwork.

"I think she *did!*" laughed Lulu, flushing, "but we had to comfort poor old grandma's sore heart."

"Don't speak in enigmas," pleaded Bek. "Janet, you are the quietest, please begin at the beginning and tell me all the way through."

"And children don't you dare interrupt," said Janet, lifting a warning forefinger.

"No," promised the twins. Lulu would not promise.

"Well, Bek, while you were so sick Mary

Wilcox came to see her mother. It seems that she has a better heart than she used to have, than the one she was born with, and she came to take her mother and the youngest little orphan back to California. Grandma would not be separated from them, and that is the reason Mary would not take her into her home before. But she lost her baby this spring, and then she began to long for her mother. Grandma was more than glad to go, for she loves Mary, but she would not separate the children; she wanted Mary to take them all. But Mary, as usual, was as firm as a rock. Then 'Rye,' as Lulu prettily calls him, not liking 'Mark,' and eschewing 'Mr. Ryerson,' came to the rescue with a bold proposition that had the effect of throwing a bomb into this quiet household. Grandma had cried and said she would never see him married if she went, and engagements were often broken, and what would become of the dear children! She would not go unless Mark had a wife to look after him, and to take care of the children—"

"Why, Lulu!" exclaimed Bek, flushing with bewilderment.

"Rye would insist," said Lulu, demurely; "he said it was the last thing he could do to make his

mother happy. I felt dreadfully about it! I wanted you to be with us and know about it." Lulu's lip quivered and the slow tears rolled down her cheeks.

"It was so happy and solemn; Mr. Dunraven had been praying with you, and he came downstairs and married us; Janet would not leave you, but all the others huddled around; father cried like a baby and so did grandma; everything grew dark before my eyes, and if Rye hadn't caught me I should have fallen. It was over in a few minutes, and kisses and tears and congratulations were in order. Grandma and Mary started for California in two hours, Rye drove them to the depot and I was left—rather the children were left—with me. Mary pitied me with all her heart, she said, and said her brother stood in his own light and in mine by keeping them. But we don't think so! Janet and Miss Southernwood have partly adopted them and Aunt Lulu doesn't have much to do beside pet them. I'm not going away until you are about the house, Bek."

"And who is housekeeper, pray?" asked Bek. She was too weak to be very much astonished at anything. Things did happen very queerly in this old, new world that she had come back to!

"Pauline, of course," returned Lulu, triumphantly. "She insisted upon coming back the first week you were delirious, and we were all glad enough to have her."

"That's delightful," sighed Bek with a happy sigh.

"I've wanted to tell you every day, but I didn't dare," said Lulu, in a relieved voice. "You are not so very sorry."

"No, dear, I'm very glad."

Lulu bent forward and kissed Bek's fingers. Janet had forbidden too much affectionate demonstration.

"And my birthday happened," said Bek. "Did anybody know it?"

"John and I spoke of it," said Janet quietly.

"Was *he* here?" asked Bek, tears that she could not control starting to her eyes.

Oh, if she might have known through the long agony that he was within sound of her voice.

"And he's here now!" cried Nell. "And as soon as you are not nervous he's coming to see you."

"I won't be nervous to-morrow," said Bek.

"Then he shall come to-morrow," promised Janet, "and your father shall take you down to the hammock again."

"How much I've learned about father," said Bek, "when he takes me into his arms, I feel so snug and safe. He seems so strong and sure! I feel like a baby in a cradle. I can understand now how mother loved to have him always with her! And he says I am like mother, and it seems like taking care of her. I wish she knew—I wish she could hear him pray and sing."

"She does know, if it will add to her happiness," said Janet; "if the angels rejoice over one that repents, why should not the saints who love them best?"

"I'll tell him that," said Bek.

"I have told him," Janet said, "and it was worth while to see his face."

After a little while Bek said solemnly, "I've been thinking about Lazarus. He really came back from the dead. How different life must have seemed to him."

"Does it to you?" asked Janet.

"Yes."

"*How* different?" questioned Lulu.

"Isn't there something about being risen with Christ? As if we had come out of the grave with Him! I want to look at life as He does—as far as I can. I do not think the 'cares' will choke me,

Lulu; I have learned that things happen without me."

"Perhaps now you could even bear to be rich," suggested Janet, with a mystery in her voice.

"No; I don't want to be rich. Janet, I can trust Him with the mortgage now."

"I hope you can," exclaimed Janet, with energy.

"Janet, if I want to, may I see your brother to-day?" she asked shyly. "He is to me spiritually what father is physically. My spirit feels so sure and safe with him."

Janet laughed. "He said he would not see you until you asked for him. And he can talk delicious nonsense—there's so much sense in it."

## XXIII.

### IN THE HAMMOCK.

“God giveth. Not His best at first;  
He who set forth the feast of old  
Began with wine that was the worst;  
After the crimson comes the gold.”—MRS. WHITNEY.

AUGUST! Was it August so soon? And where had July gone? It had gone in prayers and musings, hope and happiness, in restful days and restful nights, with Janet ever at her side to render lovingly the slightest service, with Janet's brother to give himself without slightest reservation. What a happy world this was to come back to! How restful and joyful even the kingdom on the earth might be! To Bek! But to some other? Gertrude Prentiss was some one else in the kingdom on the earth. She found Bek in the hammock one August morning. The hammock was swung in one corner of the shaded front piazza; the low hanging branches of the evergreen screened her from view at one side and honeysuckle climbed in green pro-

fusion at the end. Floy told her that she was as snug as a pea in a pod, Bertie said she was a bird in a tree, Nell declared that she was a lovely rose nestled among green leaves; this morning she was only a little bundle of white with a shining head. Gertrude knew where to find her; she dropped herself, literally *dropped*, as though she were weary of being suspended, into a camp-chair near Bek's head and regarded her awhile before she spoke.

"Well," smiled Bek, the survey being ended.

"I almost wish I was *you*; I never saw any one before that I came so near envying."

"There's Lulu," said Bek, "no one could be happier than she. She's filled full of happiness."

"So are you."

"Am I? Am I *satisfied*?"

"You look so."

"So I am this instant. But Janet is going away, and Lulu and the children and my new, dear brother. Do you think of my winter without them?"

"Has her brother gone? Mr. Prentiss?"

"Not quite yet. A college friend has supplied his pulpit at home all this long time. He says this vacation is to last him ten years."

Gertrude swung the hammock to and fro.

"I'm so sorry for you, dear—about the baby," said Bek, touching her hand.

"You need not be. Your sympathy is wasted. I can't tell any one else so. I am glad he is gone."

"Oh, Gertrude!" cried Bek, inexpressibly shocked.

The faded, wan face, the expressionless voice that gathered energy now and then! How Bek's heart ached for the poor wife who had been ruddy Gertrude Raymond with so much to look forward to, so much to live for.

"I *am* glad. I have thanked the Lord who once took little children into His arms."

"They said he was so cunning. Three months old, too."

"He was soft and warm and sweet. He would have said 'mamma' by and by. But he will never grow up to—there is such a thing as an inherited taste. Haven't you heard of it?"

"Yes," said Bek shivering, in a startled tone.

"His little clothes are folded away; I kiss them but I shed no tears."

"Poor mother!" said Bek, stroking her cheek.

"There comes Mr. Prentiss. I hope he will call again to see Julius," Gertrude exclaimed as his step touched the piazza. Rising hastily she passed through the hall in search of Miss Southernwood.

Mr. Prentiss came to the hammock and looked down into the eyes that were radiant through tears.

She smiled and lifted her hand. What a stronghold he was after thinking of Gertrude's husband!

"So Janet cannot beguile you away, to grow strong," he said taking the frail hand into his own.

"No one can beguile me away from this green corner. It is the sea-shore;—I close my eyes and the wind in the locusts, the maples and the evergreen is like the sound of the sea, I open them and look out through the opening between the evergreen and the honeysuckle at the tree-tops far away and I see the mountains."

"Perhaps you want the bustle and din of the city?"

"Not yet."

"When?"

"When I am stronger. Lulu has planned for me to visit her this winter, and I shall see Janet, and Rye is a dear, big brother."

He drew the camp-chair a little nearer the hammock, seated himself and played with the colored ropes. "And I thought last summer that he wanted, and you wanted, something else—something nearer and dearer than big brotherhood."

"*Did* you? Why how could you?" she asked.

"I did, and so it seems I could," he answered easily.

"It was very queer. I never thought of such a thing. I couldn't," she added decisively.

"Why couldn't you?" he asked smiling at her quick-coming color.

"Because I didn't want to. Isn't that a sufficient reason?" she said untangling the fringe of her shawl.

"Sufficient, certainly. But Lulukin thought so."

"Did she?" laughed Bek. "Perhaps she was afraid of it."

"You were too busy, weren't you?"

"Too busied with other things. I think I have learned the lesson about money that you wanted me to."

"I am sure you have."

"Still I do feel troubled a little about the great expense of my illness. There's one bill of a hundred dollars for beef for beef tea, and another hundred for other things—Janet would have all she wanted and father was so willing to obey her, and the doctor's bill—I would part with the piano,—it's all I have to sell, but I can't take it from the twins, and it will be so long before I can earn money."

"I hope you never will," he returned with energy.

"Isn't that cruel?"

"You do not need to. Don't you know you do not need to?"

"Father comforts me about it and says I'm worth a fortune, but I do not feel it."

"You must feel it," he said imperatively, watching the flecks of sunshine upon her hair and the white shawl. What a fragile little thing she was!

"Can I feel a thing that I do not know?"

"You must not be obstinate, you must take our word for it. I am the bearer of good tidings to-day. I have come to tell you a secret."

The face that he was watching paled and then flushed; he imprisoned the hands that were trembling and held them gently and firmly in his, speaking lightly. Janet had declared that he was as good a nurse as she was herself. Bek was learning that the assertion was true.

"I wrote you a secret once, didn't I? When you were a little girl seventeen years old. Now I have another of the same kind. Your old aunt was afraid to trust you with more than sufficient for your education and a few other things, and commissioned me to take care of a certain sum

for you until you were grown wise and good to appreciate its value and to use it well. I was to give it into your hands when you were twenty-five; but on that day you were not wise enough to appreciate it and use it well, and I have kept the secret until you were wise enough. And I think you are wise enough to-day."

Bewilderment and delight battled with each other in her eyes.

"Is it much?" she asked as soon as surprise permitted her to speak.

"Enough to pay all your bills."

"Oh, I'm so glad! So more than glad! I'll tell father as soon as he comes in. May I have it immediately?" she asked nervously, with bright spots burning in each cheek.

"As soon as I can give it to you."

"Oh, how good Aunt Rebekah was! In what a time of need it has come."

"There will be something over."

"Another hundred?" she questioned. "I want to buy things for Lulu's housekeeping. It may seem extravagant, but I would like a whole thousand for Lulu. To furnish her house and to furnish her wardrobe. She isn't dressed like a bride."

"There will be a whole thousand for that."

Her breath seemed taken away.

"I might as well wish for enough for the mortgage now," she cried with a sound like a sob.

"There is enough for the mortgage," he said gravely.

"Oh, dear!" She caught her breath and her lips grew white.

"Bek, darling, don't do so!"

But she burst into hysterical tears and sobbed until he spoke sternly.

"You do not deserve to know the rest. I thought I could trust you."

"Do trust me. I'll be very good. Is there *more?*"

"Enough to send the twins to Rutledge Felix, and then there will be something over for yourself."

"There's Chip to send to a business college, I wonder if I can do that."

"I think you can."

"Is that *all?*"

"Oh, you craving spirit! Isn't that enough?"

"But I want to know in dollars and cents," she urged.

"You practical little business woman!"

"Did mother know?" she asked, the truth flashing upon her that this was what her mother meant by being "provided for."

"Yes, I told her. She knew it was a sacred trust."

A sacred trust! The very words. How her heart sickened in the midst of her bewildering happiness. This money meant so much to them all, but, oh, for herself, how she longed for something beside and better!

"You haven't said how much," she said faintly.

"Ten thousand dollars at compound interest since your seventeenth birthday!"

She repeated his words in slow amazement.

"Mother would like me to do these things."

"I am sure she would; but she asked me to beg you to keep something for yourself."

"Oh, there's enough for me," she said contentedly. "Just bend your head and thank God for me and then go and tell father."

"I will, in one moment. Will you give *me* something to thank Him for, too?"

"I wish I *could*," she said so low that he bent nearer to catch the words.

"O, Bek! Bek!" the twins cried together dancing from the hall out to the hammock.

"Oh, Bek, you can't think!" exclaimed Nell.

"Oh, Bek, you never *could* guess," exclaimed Floy.

The dark flush that Bek knew had mounted to Mr. Prentiss' forehead; he tipped back in the camp-chair and looked at the twins.

Over Floy's arm was a mass of blue something, in her eagerness Nell was catching at the mass of blue.

"Do try to guess!" coaxed Floy.

"What shall I guess about?" asked Bek.

"Guess about something that is lost," said Nell.

"Your penknife."

"Oh, it's worth more than that."

"Bertie's 'Chatterbox.'"

"No," they both cried.

"Lulu's shoe-buttoner."

"Now do be sensible!" rebuked Floy.

"No, go on," laughed Mr. Prentiss, "we shall have a list of every thing that is lost in the household."

"Even hearts?" queried Nell, saucily.

"Father's new rake," guessed Bek.

"In the pocket of my muslin dress!" rejoined Floy.

"And it has been there ever since it was lost!"

Or rather ever since it *wasn't* lost," Nell corrected.

"Now do guess like a sensible girl."

"Whose is it?" Bek questioned.

"Your name is on it," said Floy, delightedly, "and *wasn't* I glad to find it? You know you said we might give our blue muslins to that girl in Lulu's class that can't come to Sunday-school—"

"Because she hasn't a blue muslin," interrupted Nell.

"And you had two," said Mr. Prentiss.

"But it was in my pocket," said Floy; "*now*, can't you guess! I had it on the day I lost—Why, how can you help guessing."

"Have I missed it?" questioned Bek.

"You never had it; but you felt pretty blue about it," laughed Floy, "and I did, too,—more than blue. Now, you *must* know!"

"It isn't—" Bek half arose, the crimson in her cheeks.

"No; it isn't!" said Floy, tantalizingly. "Guess again!"

Floy was sure that Mr. Prentiss knew by the fun in his eyes; he seemed really enjoying Bek's confusion.

"Don't tease her," he laughed.

Bek threw herself back again as Floy dropped

the letter in her lap, and ran away, Nell followed catching the trailing blue muslin. With the crimson in her cheeks, and eyes too full of something to be lifted, Bek picked at the envelope. How well she remembered that rainy afternoon! Had she ever been so depressed in all her life! And that long quotation in "Memorials of a Quiet Life;" and the anxiety and the trembling hope about the letter now safe in her fingers. That was in October and to-day was August! But the letter was taken from her fingers and the fingers themselves taken into custody. The dark head was close to her own again; the rings of hair were touching his lips.

"May I thank Him because you have given yourself to me?"

The surprise was too great and too sudden—and yet was it a surprise? Perhaps it was the joy that was too great and too sudden; her lips moved, but she did not speak; but he understood, and it was not the first hour in which he understood. He bent his head and kissed her lips—the lips, that for very joy, could not frame one syllable, and then, in a voice that was as tremulous as the beating of her heart, he gave thanks for the sure happiness He had given to them both.

And after that what happened? Why, things just began to happen. And they kept happening until you see them again, five years afterward, on this same piazza, with the same hammock swinging in Bek's shaded corner.

The children's father came to the doorway with a hat full of harvest apples, tossing one to each as they bent forward or stayed their word or their talk to catch it. Bek's mother's husband; more and more he was that to Bek and every year he grew worthier of being her husband. "My wife" was still the tenderest memory of his life. Bek had bought the farm for the children, but it was to be his as long as he lived.

Miss Southernwood had grown five years older and five years lovelier; she dated her letters to Bek: "Written from Clovernook." Bek, more than twice or thrice had dated her letters, written in her husband's study: "Written from Rome."

Janet had come, also—she came every summer with the Ryersons to spend her vacation at the farm; she looked her five years older, every year left its imprint on her heart and in her face.

Lulu had long known the story of how Janet Prentiss was her husband's first love; her sweet, arch eyes had lifted themselves to his when he

had finished the story and all she said was: "I'm sorry that Janet has lost so much." "Rye," as they had all learned to say, was still as handsome as Lulu's ideal of a Saxon king; he still sat all day long on his high stool, but his salary had been increased; his wife, as well as himself, gave music lessons for love of it, but Lulu contended that they were both saving for the little farm in Clovernook that was to be their refuge in old age.

The children, Sylvia, Dorcas and Fanny, seemed to be generally adopted by the whole family; Janet claimed them as especially her own.

The twins were grown up, of course. Floy had developed a talent for housekeeping and Nell was teaching the Clovernook school. Chip's business education had earned him the right to become a man of business; he had a good clerkship in Cumberland, and, as the time of the family gathering chanced to come within the limit of his ten days' vacation, he was at home in time to tease the two babies to his heart's content. The two babies were Lulu's charming four-year-old Jennie and Bek's sturdy two-year-old Mark; small uncle Bertie was their chief companion.

John Prentiss was John Prentiss still; not changed, but developed. Bek said loving her

husband was every day helping her to love Christ.

Miss Southernwood was as settled at the farm as though she had at first taken root there; everybody knew that she intended to educate Bertie and until the time for him to prepare for college, her comfortable income gave itself in many ways to the twins.

Mollie Sherwood was teaching at Rutledge Felix, with a look not always peaceful and a heart seldom at rest. She began to believe that God had chosen every good thing for Bek, and she was perfectly satisfied with Bek's explanation of her husband being chosen through the desire and need of her own heart. Mollie, herself, is not a happy woman; she says sometimes that she cannot give thanks for her creation. But Bek hopes for her. She does not understand Bek's life nor Bek's work.

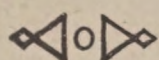
Not very long ago Mrs. Rutledge said to Miss Southernwood, who still kept record of the lives of her girls: "Of all the girls you are keeping trace of, who is the happiest and most successful?"

Unhesitatingly she answered,

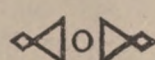
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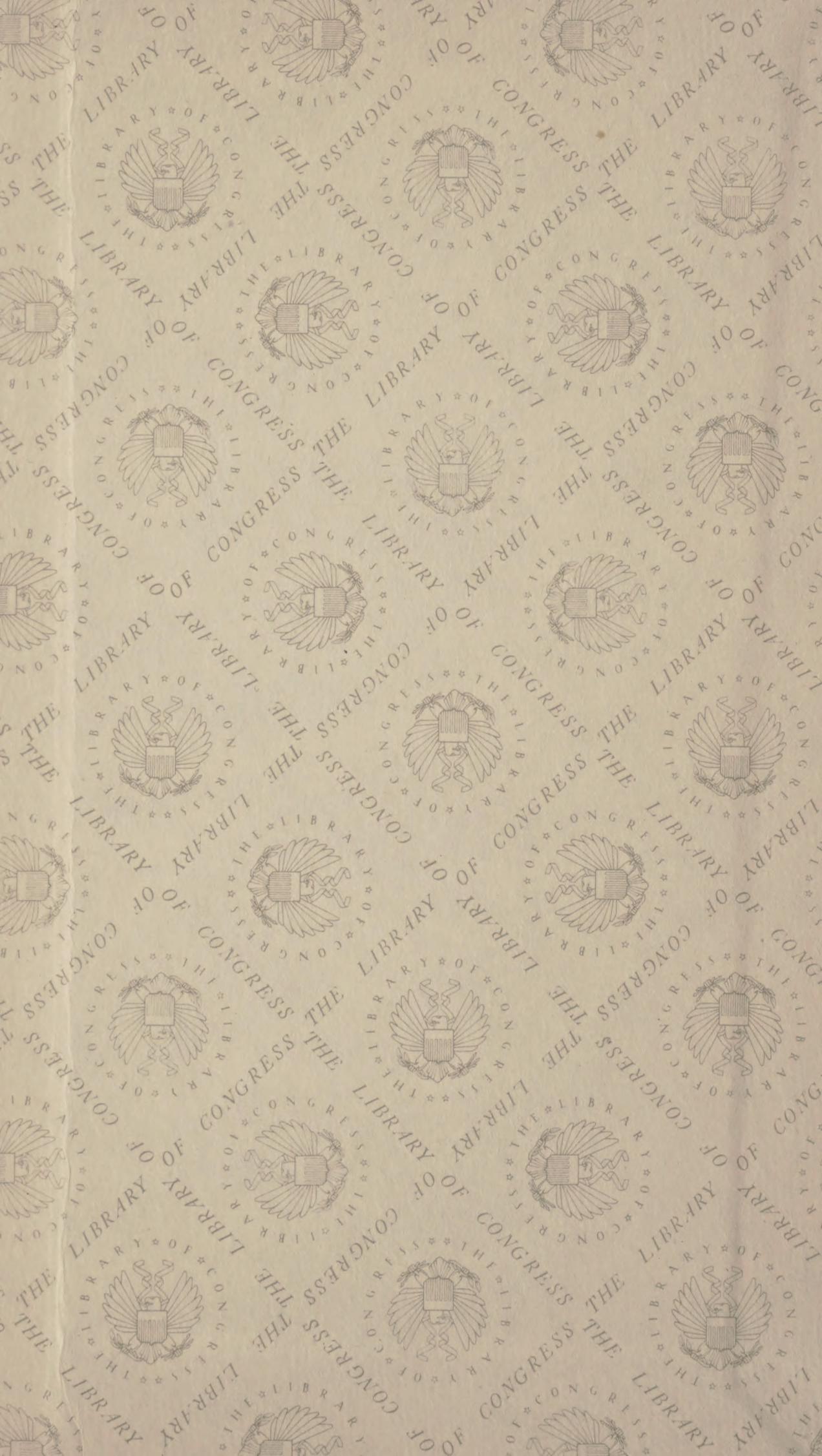
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